

**Foundations: OUR PRAYERS**  
**Matthew 6:9-15 (AFBC 3/5/17)**

Some of us shared together in Ash Wednesday services this past week. Josh and Amy led those services for us. This has recently become a tradition in our church. Of course, it's been a tradition in many churches for centuries--and for good reason.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent in the Christian calendar—40 days—and, by the way, if you do the math, it comes out to 40 days only if Sundays are not included—so, 40 other days, plus six Sundays, in which we prepare our hearts for the celebration of our Lord's resurrection. We call it "Easter."

As you know, forty days has special significance in the Bible. In Exodus, we're told that Moses spent 40 days with God on Mount Sinai. In I Kings, Elijah spent 40 days--and nights--walking to Mount Horeb.

In Genesis, it rained for 40 days and nights leading up to the Great Flood. In the prophecy of Jonah, the city of Nineveh was given 40 days in which to repent or be destroyed.

Finally, Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days and then resisted Satan's temptations before beginning His ministry; and our Risen Lord remained on earth for forty days after Easter before ascending to the Heavenly Father.

Our forerunners in the faith felt that Easter was too big, too important, to just "let it happen." We needed adequate time to prepare for this life-transforming event.

Buying new clothes and dying and hunting Easter eggs is not enough. We need to prepare our lives—specifically--by confessing our sins.

The ashes affixed to our foreheads last Wednesday were a sign of penitence—a sincere sadness over our faults and failures.

During the 40 days of Lent, many bring added focus to this need by depriving themselves of something--thus the familiar, "What are you giving up for Lent?"

An ancient tradition is not to eat meat during Lent—but it may take more discipline for some of us to refrain from, say, breads or sweets. These simple sacrifices, though, remind us that the Christian life requires discipline.

Worship is a discipline. Bible study and prayer are disciplines. Tithing is a discipline. Serving the Lord by serving others is a discipline.

Jesus lived a disciplined life, and died a disciplined death. Those of us who follow Him reflect certain disciplines in our lives as well.

In our study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we come today to "The Lord's Prayer." Just as Jesus' life is a model for our living, the Lord's Prayer is a model for our praying.

It's not intended to be our only prayer—in worship, or otherwise. It's a model prayer in the sense of being a pattern that can guide us in our praying.

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them "how to pray." They did not ask Him to teach them "a prayer." You see the difference.

So today, I want us to look at this model prayer Jesus gave us and discover some directives, or even better, some "disciplines," that Jesus obviously intends for us to live by in our relationship with Him. After all, He taught us to pray about these things.

During the six Sundays of Lent, we will include the Lord's Prayer in our worship services. I want to encourage us to do something else as well.

On the other 40 days of Lent, let's include the Lord's Prayer in our personal prayers—every day. I hope we'll choose to do this each day leading up to Easter.

Also, if you have a child in your care who has not memorized the Lord's Prayer, please help them do so.

And once they have, encourage them to come and share this prayer with yours truly—or with Josh or Amy or their Sunday School teacher or music or missions leader. We'd all love to hear them say it from memory.

To get started, let's all say the Lord's Prayer together now:

**Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in  
heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:  
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever.  
Amen.**

It's short, isn't it? Yet I want us to see this morning how it is packed full of spiritual disciplines—there's that word again—so important to anyone who seeks to be a *disciple* of Jesus. By definition, this means we're to live *disciplined* lives.

In this brief prayer, our Lord includes several practices He wants us to include in our lives—and in our prayers. All of these are vital if our prayers are to have any depth of meaning. If these show up in our prayers, they will also be reflected in our lives.

**1. The first discipline--and I think we'll all agree that this is necessary if prayer is to happen at all—again, the first discipline is **Connecting with God.****

That's step one: we take the time, and we make the effort, to get connected, to enter into the presence of "Our Father, which art (who is) in heaven."

So often, we focus on the word *Father*—and we should—but don't miss the fact that Jesus began this prayer with the word "Our." We can pray alone, or we can pray with others. Either way, however, we should always pray with an awareness of others.

If we fail to do this, prayer becomes selfish. "Our" Father is inclusive. Think about this: as we pray, there could be thousands of our brothers and sisters who are approaching our heavenly Father at precisely the same moment as we are.

Some of them will have needs that are much greater than ours. Some will be more sincere than we are; others... less so. Some prayers will already be aligned with God's will, while other requests will be for something too outlandish to merit a response.

So much of this depends on our relationship with our Heavenly Father, how much we've gotten to know Him and to what extent we've embraced the insight into His will that He's provided for us through His written word, the Bible, and the Living Word, Jesus Christ.

While it's true that everyone is a child of God through creation, we come to know God as our Heavenly Father only as we receive His Son into our lives.

As we are incorporated into Christ Jesus, as we become members of His body in this world, we, too, are adopted as the sons and daughters of God.

The Apostle John explained it like this: **“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12)**

To pray as Jesus prayed requires that we not only receive this prayer He taught us, we must also receive Him—trusting in Him as our Savior, believing that His name is above all others, and bowing before Him to confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

If you’ve never received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, this is where you must begin if you are ever to fully appreciate the meaning of this prayer—begin by entering into relationship with the One who taught it to us.

Jesus reminds us next that while we approach God as our Father, we must also understand that His Name is to be “hallowed.” God is our Father, not our “old man.” He is “our Father in heaven,” not our “good ole’ buddy upstairs.”

While Pam and I were visiting with Claire and Katie after Christmas, we went to see the movie, “Jackie.”

It tells the story of Mrs. Kennedy as she tried to first deal with the assassination and then also plan the funeral for her husband, President John F. Kennedy. I found myself in tears as I relived that national tragedy that took place when I was in the fourth grade.

I remember sitting in front of the TV with my parents watching President Kennedy’s children, Caroline and John, Jr., walking behind their father’s horse-drawn casket. If you haven’t seen the movie, I would encourage you to do so. It was time well spent.

Many of us remember that sad time in our nation’s history all too well. If you do, then you may also remember the photos that were taken of the President’s children during happier times, playing with their toys on the floor of the Oval Office.

Life Magazine published these photos; and it seems they captured the hearts of so many Americans—all but the most hard-hearted among us, I suppose. Cynics may be in the majority now—but I don’t think they were back then.

I mention these photos because of the way they blended together two almost diametrically opposed concepts. Here you had the most powerful man in the world, the President of the United States, but playing at his feet were two little children who called him Daddy.

Jesus teaches us that God is holy—"hallowed be His name." He should be respected and honored by all. Also, He is "in heaven"—meaning He is over and above any earthly limitations.

But He is also "our Father" who wants to hear from us. To be able to approach God and to be "with God" in prayer is one of the greatest privileges of our lives.

So we discipline ourselves to connect with God as children who know they are loved and accepted and who want always to bring honor to their Father.

**2.** Well, there's much more that could be said about this, but we need to turn our attention now to a second discipline we find here. I'll call this **Recognizing Our Dependency**.

After connecting us to the Father, Jesus tells us to ask God for what we most need. But again, it doesn't begin with us, but with God: **"THY Kingdom come, THY will be done..."**

Friends, when we pray this we're asking for all those spiritual qualities Jesus talks about in the Beatitudes and all the ways He tells us to live in the rest of this sermon to actually become part of our lives—not just in theory, but in actual practice!

We're also asking God to expand His Kingdom in this world by bringing the saving message of Christ to all nations. We're praying for God to break down all the barriers that we build between people and God, and between ourselves and others.

This was Jesus' focus: doing the will of the Father. He said: **"For I have come... to do the will of him who sent me." (John 6:38)** And in the Garden, he prayed, **"...not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)**

That took tremendous discipline for Jesus. And it takes discipline for you and me to recognize and admit our dependency on God; for us to seek to conform our wills to His will.

Seeking to further God's Kingdom and to do God's will becomes our priority—and that requires prayer. Jesus told us that the Kingdom of God is where? Within us! (Lk. 17:21) So Kingdom work begins right here. Doing God's will begins with my life and yours!

Where are we focusing our attention in our prayers—on God's will, on His Kingdom, or our own wills... and maybe even our own little kingdoms? There's a big difference.

It takes a lot of discipline to recognize our dependency on God, beginning with getting our wills in line with His. Then we're ready to pray for things like "our daily bread"—which is not a lot in some ways; but as we recognize our total dependency on God, we realize that it's all we really need.

A little gravy would be nice with that bread; but in the final analysis, it's only gravy.

Hiking on the Appalachian Trail for days at a time, carrying everything I will have to eat and drink in that pack on my back, has taught me how little it takes to sustain us in this world.

Don't get me wrong. After a few days on the trail, I'm ready to get back to something more. But at the same time, it gives me far greater appreciation for something as simple as "daily bread."

In our affluent society, we can lose touch with any sense of dependency on anyone other than ourselves. Jesus is telling us not to let that happen.

This is more important than we realize. Listen to this same truth as we find it in the Old Testament book of Proverbs:

**"Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' (Proverbs 30:7-9)**

Are we there yet? Have we become too independent to be the children of our Heavenly Father? To avoid this trap that so many fall into today will require discipline.

And not just in relation to our physical needs. This same dependency on God is required to meet our spiritual needs as well.

**"Forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors..."** Children who recognize their need to be forgiven don't try to keep others indebted to them by refusing to forgive. Only those who feel no dependency on the Father will allow that to happen.

C. S. Lewis made this astute observation: **"We all agree that forgiveness is a beautiful idea until we have to practice it."** This takes discipline, friends—the discipline that comes by way of dependency on God.

As God's children, we also realize that we need to be protected. We get led astray so easily. We fall down often. So, Heavenly Father, **"lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."**

Do we embrace our temptations or ask God to deliver us from them? God is always willing to pick us up and point us back in the right direction, but life is so much better when we experience the wisdom and grace not to get so disoriented in the first place.

Prayer helps us to stay on track and get somewhere worth going.

**3.** Again, we've only scratched the surface on this matter of depending on God, but we must turn now to our third discipline, which I'm calling **"Offering Our Praise."**

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

In teaching us how to pray, Jesus wants us to know it's all God's—all that has been, all that now is, and the fullness of everything yet to come. All the power that brings it into being and then sustains it belongs to Him.

All the glory for this remarkable gift we know as life and all the beauty we're privileged to see about us is His.

This is why our souls reach out to make this connection with God. It's why we need to recognize our dependency on God.

It is why it's so important for us to discipline ourselves to offer this good, and gracious, loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful Father-God our sincere adoration and praise.

As Jesus taught us (together): **For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**