

A MODEL FOR PRAYER

*The Model Prayer is short and concise and touches on all areas of a lives
in our relationships and the needs we have for body, soul and spirit.*

The Lord's Prayer or the Model Prayer is repeated each Sunday in some churches as part of a ritual the member go through during their worship services. We see it used in stories of people who "pray this prayer" in times of great distress or as a last resort to a desperate situation. It is sometime used as a mantra or words to be repeated to perhaps influence God. Many times it has become exactly what Jesus said that true prayer should NOT be.

Most devotions or commentaries on the Model Prayer focus on the word of the prayer, however, it is also important for us to see that beyond the words, our attitudes and motives for praying were part of the instructions Jesus gave us.

While the actual words of the prayer start in verse 9, the preparation and conditions for prayer begin in verse 5.

In so many cases when God deals with people. It seems that the starting point can be summarized in one word: Repent. In other words, before you start doing what is right or ideal (the model), you must first abandon the erroneous methods. We are not called to add God's way to the ways of the world, but we are to turn from the old and embrace only the new.

To repent is to stop going in one direction and start going in another direction. So Jesus began His instruction regarding prayer with what we are to cease doing.

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. (Matt 6:5)

The purpose of prayer is not to appear to be religious. Sometimes we whitewash this motive of "being seen by others" by saying that we are "just trying to give a good Christian witness." According to the words of Jesus we must be very careful with regard to our motives in what we do.

There is an alternative to praying "to be seen of others" and to avoid the uncertainty of what are our true motives. That alternative is found in verse 6.

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matt 6:6)

Even this alternative is not above human

pride and the need to try to impress others. If you announce and publicize that you are "in your prayer closet, then you have missed the point.

The idea of prayer is not unique to Judeo-Christian religion. As I read about other cultures or see programs on TV, we see evidence of prayer in the Moslem world, among the Buddhist, and other religions. In fact they seem to be more devoted to frequent and regular prayer than most Christians are. When Jesus taught His disciples about prayer there was no admonition that they should pray. I guess that He assumed that the need for prayer in a person's life was so obvious that encouragement to pray was not needed. Jesus directed His teaching to how we should approach God and the kinds of things for which we should look to God.

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Matt 6:7-8)

Jesus continued with a precaution about using vain repetitions. The message here is that prayer is not a magic incantation that causes things to happen. It is not going to each point on a prayer wheel or saying every group of words associated with a set of prayer beads. It is not necessarily even repeating the Lord's Prayer, the 23rd Psalm or reading a few lines from the Book of Common Prayer. We are not dealing with Someone Who we are to manipulate or to trick into doing something for us. God is all knowing and can see through what is said to the attitude and motives of our heart. The purpose of our praying is to establish genuine communication with God so that we can also know our attitudes and motives and get in touch with the root issues in our lives. Prayer should also help establish an understanding of relationships, first of all with God, then with ourselves and finally with others.

"This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matt 6:9-10)

The priority issue that we have in life is the first thing that Jesus mentioned in the Model Prayer. That issue is our relationship to God. Jesus used the term Father in relationship to God. The most important thing we will ever do in this life is to establish a Father-Child relationship with

God. This is what being "born-again" is about. This is what God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ to accomplish. If we do not experience the new birth so that this relationship is established, then we will miss the only opportunity for eternal life.

The second highest priority issue in life is also addressed in the first words of this prayer. That issue is our relationship to other people. Notice that Jesus used the term "our" rather than "My" Father. In the simple choice of that word we are to recognize that God loves others and not just "me and mine."

The Fatherhood of God is distinguished from the relationship that we have with our natural father. "Which art in heaven" is meant to do more than just locate the presence of God. From this we realize that the relationship is supernatural and spiritual and not limited to this world.

Even as we are taught to honor our earthly parents, Jesus admonishes us to value the relationship with our Heavenly Father even more. It is to be recognized as a sacred relationship and we should be in humble awe that the Infinite God Who created everything cares for us and wants to be involved in our lives.

Part of this humility and recognition of the greatness of God is to defer our wills to His. It is to realize that His wisdom is so far superior to ours that we can do no better than to adopt His ways as our own and acknowledge his Lordship over our lives. We cannot pray this prayer and then ignore what we know to be God's will for our lives. Most of us do not have any problem in determining what God's will is for us. We know what is right and what is wrong. Whether the issue is cheating on income tax, cheating on your spouse, cheating on an exam in school, or cheating an employer out of time and work, we all know what God's will is in the matter. We all know the difference between the truth and a lie, between fair and unfair, between generosity and greed, between kindness and harshness and we know God's will in these matters.

Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matt 6:11-12)

All people have needs that must be satisfied. Many people do not realize that they have needs because what they need is always there. We take food for granted. We just assume that it will always be there; however, there are areas of the world where the need is acute and people are literally dying because needs are not being met. Since we are not only physical beings but also

spiritual beings, we must also realize that we have need for spiritual food. Just as our physical bodies would waste away and die if we did not provide food, our spiritual being will also waste away if nourishment is not provided. We cannot assume that spiritual food will be provided to us every time we come to the church. We must seek it out and make sure that we are fed spiritually in times of corporate worship, private worship and daily devotions.

None of us is perfect in our behavior. First of all, most of us don't even try to be perfect. Even those that do try to always do what is right will make mistakes. We offend others, we commit trespasses if you wish to use that terminology, we sin in that we fall short of God's goals for our lives. That's the bad news. The good news is that God is willing to forgive us if we will but ask. The extent to which God will forgive us is controlled by us. A popular theme in the business world of employee relations is "empowerment." God has been a proponent of empowerment for a long time. We call the shot on the extent of our forgiveness. God will forgive us to the same extent that we forgive those have hurt or mistreated us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. [For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.] (Matt 6:13)

One of the last areas that Jesus addressed related to the dangers that are in the world. The kingdom of God is good; however, we must still contend with the kingdom of evil. The evil one tries to destroy what belongs to God and that includes the children of God. The trap is sin and the bait is temptation. We need to acknowledge our need to be able to recognize temptation for what it is and then to avoid it.

The last statement in the King James Version (For thine is the kingdom, etc.) does not appear in the newer translations of the Bible such as the American Standard, the Revised Standard, or the NIV. It was also NOT in the Latin Vulgate version. The phrase is very similar to that used by the Jews at the end of prayers. The usual response at the close of prayers, and reading the Shema, instead of "Amen," was this: "Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom, for ever and ever." This bears some resemblance to this concluding expression, which ascribes everlasting kingdom, power, and glory, to God: which may be considered either as a doxology, or an ascription of glory to God, which is His due; and ought be given Him in all our prayers.