

Best Practices for Followers of Jesus

- Prayer, Part 6 Application

From the Series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe"

By Phil Brainerd

Presented to Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ

On Date - Sunday, March 21, 2021

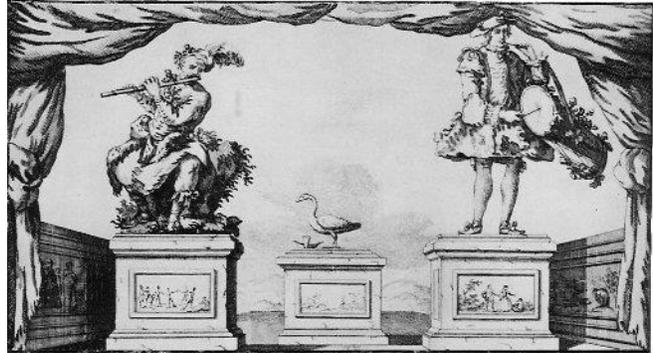
Introduction

There's a story of a toymaker who lived in the 1700s. He made all kinds of wonderful things.

These included statues of people that looked very realistic. The statues played music and did other amazing things. But, one of the most beloved of the toymaker's creations were his ducks.

They were a feat of the toymaker's art - very lifelike. Unlike the statues, the ducks

could be taken home - They were expensive, but they could be purchased.



One day, a man came into the toymaker's shop and said, "I want one of those ducks." The toymaker said, "Which one?" The man replied, "any one – it doesn't matter." So, the toymaker picked one of the ducks and set it before the man. He turned it on, and it acted like, well, a duck. The man said "Amazing! I'll buy it."

The man paid his money, but then, he did something very odd. He pulled some tools out of his coat and began to take apart the duck. After a few minutes, pieces of the duck lay all over the store counter. The man looked at all the parts and said, "Aha! Now I know how it works." Sadly, the toymaker shook his head. "Yes", he said, "But now, you no longer have your duck."

Our Lord Jesus gave us a pattern for prayer. We've been looking at it in detail over the last several sessions. We don't want to be like the man in the story we just told. He saw something amazing, and he wanted to see how it worked. - So, he tore it apart. Sadly, he learned that, if you tear things apart and don't put them back together, you lose something. So, having pulled apart this pattern for prayer over the last several sessions, we now need to put it back together. - And we need to apply what we've learned.

Let's begin. Before we do, here's a quick comment: I will work on the assumption that we all understand the main concepts since we've spent too much time looking at all the pieces. If you haven't been able to be here for the other discussions, contact me and I'll tell you where to go. We'll have some links at the end of this article.

So, as we go through this material, I will mention the concepts, not necessarily in the order we read them.

I. What does the pattern accomplish?

Let's start by asking, "What does the pattern accomplish?" We've been saying for a while that we want to be effective followers of Jesus. What does it mean to pray effectively? As we look at that question, we'll start by stating what it doesn't mean. It does not mean that we get whatever we want, whenever we want it.

Let's look at how the pattern opens:

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.
(Matthew 6:9-10)

One of the wonderful things that this pattern does is helps us on the path to restoration. The core problem of the human race is that we have turned away from God. You've heard the Scripture from Isaiah: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way... (Isaiah 53:6)" Way back in the garden of Eden, humans turned away from God. This has resulted in every problem in the universe. This is the core of sin: We turn away from God and pursue our own desires. So, in this prayer, we turn back.

We've learned along the way that we should pray this prayer daily. This means, every day, we discipline ourselves to turn away from the world - away from our own desires - and turn towards God. We pray not to or for ourselves, but to God. He graciously allows us to call him "Father". We do not pray to anything on this earth, but we pray to our Father in heaven.

On this earth, everyone wants to make a name for themselves. You've heard that, right? "Go out and make a name for yourself." But here, we pray, "Hallowed be your name". We pray for God's name, not ours.

On earth, most people work to build their own little kingdom. It may be just a few square feet, it might be a corporation, but we imagine ourselves to be the kings and queens of our own little realms. When we pray for God's kingdom to come, that means his kingdom will replace the kingdoms of this world. But it also means that God's kingdom will come and replace our kingdom, as well.

On earth, everything is a power struggle. We want what we want. We want it now. We want our will to be done. But here, we pray not for our will, but that God's will be done.

So, this prayer, when prayed daily, does not give us what we want when we want it. That's not effective prayer. Effective prayer starts when we pray that God will get what he wants, when he wants it.

This prayer, when properly prayed, helps to restore us to the state we were in before we fell.

You've heard it said that prayer changes things. That's true. But what's more important: Effective prayer changes us. Once we are growing in righteousness, then the words of James apply to us: "A prayer of a righteous person, when it is brought about, can accomplish much..." (James 5:16)

Now, having said that, are we saying that you can never pray for anything else? Of course not. This is a pattern for daily prayer. It is a discipline; a daily activity. If you fall off a boat and find yourself staring into the face of a shark, of course you're going to pray for help. The Scriptures are full of times when people ask for help in a moment of need. But we don't normally fall off boats and face sharks. This is a pattern for daily prayer (again, at least). It's where we start each day. And we start by orienting ourselves towards God.

So, what does the pattern accomplish? First and foremost, it accomplishes our restoration in the divine plan of God for our lives. We turn away from ourselves and our world, and we orient ourselves towards God.

What else does this accomplish? It accomplishes other things related to that restoration. For example, we don't start by saying "My Father." We say "our father". In saying this, we're not just orienting ourselves towards God. We're orienting ourselves towards God and others as well. We're recognizing that we're part of a family, a community, a body. We don't just greedily run to God because we want him all to ourselves. We want him for others, too.

There are other ways that this pattern restores us. Next, it reminds us of our total dependence on God. We read, "Give us today our daily bread." We spoke about the principle of this in some length when we discussed this verse a few sessions back. Suffice it to say that the world is much more fragile than we realize. Everything we know could go in an instant without God's active protection.

But here we learn something more. It's not just that the earth is fragile. ***It's that every single thing that comes from the earth is from the hand of God.***

We think that everything we have comes from our own efforts - Or at least, most things. So, we don't bother to ask for those things. Why ask for something you can get by yourself? We understand that at some point, big things come up. Then, we think, then and only then do we go to God. God is the last resort in the minds of many.

I heard Charles Stanley talking about this the other day. He lamented that many people only come to God when things in their life get out of control. He warned people – don't wait until things are out of control. Come to God first - Always first. Ask God for the small things as well as the big things. ***Ask, because all things, small or large, come from God's almighty and generous hand.***

Here's where a big question comes up: Does this mean that we should never plan in advance? Does this mean we can't put money in the bank or plan for "a rainy day". I don't believe that's what Jesus is saying. He's talking about our attitude towards the things we need.

We read about this in the book of James:

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." (James 4:13-15)

So, James says this clearly. We are just a mist. We appear for a while and then we go away. We are fragile. Our world is fragile. Fortunately, God is strong and eternal. It's OK to put things in the bank - But, keep the proper attitude. Whatever we have, whether it be just enough to make it through a day, or enough to have a big bank account, it comes from the hand of God.

And we must remind ourselves about that daily. We remind ourselves by asking. We're not taught to thank God for the things that we create. We're told to ask that God provide. God may respond by providing us with a job. He may provide us with the opportunity to be trained in a skill. He may provide the health and strength we need to accomplish our tasks. But always remember – he provides. By asking we acknowledge the source of the good things we enjoy.

So, the pattern of prayer helps us to be reminded of our total dependence on God.

Let's consider another aspect of the pattern: We learned in our study that the total dependence on God that we're describing isn't limited to physical needs like bread. It involves spiritual things as well.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)

When we ask daily to be forgiven our debts, caused by our sins, we are reminded that our salvation is totally dependent on God. We are reminded that we are not standing at the throne of God because we deserve to be there. We are there only because of the precious shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And as we started by saying, this prayer is effective in that it changes us. That's why we ask for help to forgive others. God wants us to be like him. He is forgiving. So his desire for us is that we learn to forgive, too.

Now, here we need to answer some questions.

First, whom are we commanded to forgive? Answer: You are commanded to forgive people who hurt you personally. Let's look at an example. One of the biggest monsters of the twentieth century was Joseph Stalin, head of the Soviet Union. Way back in 1989 the New York Times published an article about the work of a historian named Roy Medvedev. This historian attempted to document the crimes of Joseph Stalin. He estimated that 20 million people died because of Stalin. That was a horror beyond belief. You are **not** required to forgive Joseph Stalin. You are **not** required to forgive all the evil people in the world. You **are** only required to forgive people who have hurt you.

This is very important. If you're a police officer and you see a thug hurting someone, it is not your responsibility to forgive the thug. - It's your responsibility to apprehend the thug, using whatever force necessary. If you're the judge who sits on the bench when the thug is brought into court, it's not your responsibility to forgive the thug. It's your responsibility to see that the thug is brought to justice. If you're the person who was attacked by the thug (and this is where it gets hard), yes, it's your responsibility to forgive.

This brings us to the next question: What does it mean to forgive? Forgiveness means that you will not demand payment from those who hurt you. Payment may be money. Payment may be punishment like time in jail. Payment may be that someone who caused you pain is made to hurt. There was a time in world history when a criminal might be whipped or even tortured. Forgiveness means that you will not demand these things.

This brings us to another important point: Forgiveness does not automatically make pain go away. Let me share a personal example. I once cut my thumb with a can opener at Thanksgiving. I had to get 5 stitches. Every time I forgot and bent my thumb, I felt excruciating pain. After about a month, the cut healed, and the pain went away. About a year later, I was playing volleyball. When volleyball heads towards a good volleyball player, the player responds by holding their hands together with their thumbs on top. It's called a "bump". When I did that, the volleyball hit exactly where the stitches used to be. It really hurt. This was a year after the original injury.

That's how pain and injury sometimes work. Something can come along years after we've been hurt that touches off pain. Here's why this is important: I've known people who have been hurt. They've been obedient to the command of God. They called upon God to ask for help to forgive the person who hurt them. Then, a long time after, they feel pain. And they think, "Oh no! I haven't forgiven!" That's not actually the case. Be careful to mix up pain and forgiving the pain. Pain has a way of resurfacing. Here's what you will do if this happens to you. If you have forgiven someone and later feel pain, you will forgive the person again. Sometimes, you have to forgive people multiple times for the same offense.

And remember: There is a reward for obedience. When we follow the commands of God, we become like him. That means in the end, we know him and enjoy him more. But recall: we are warned. If we do not forgive at all, there is some question about whether we've really understood forgiveness in the first place. This creates all kinds of problems. The reward for forgiveness is an increased experience of God's heart. The warning for those who fail to forgive is that they may not be forgiven in the first place. It could be that your next prayer should be to ask God to forgive you for your lack of forgiveness.

Let's move on.

Our total dependence on God also includes defense against our enemy, the Devil. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He did battle with the devil and won. That's what good kings do - They enter into battle so that they can protect their subjects. So Jesus tells us to pray that we do not fall into temptation. He says this because he has already won. He wants to go ahead of us and fight our battles against the enemy for us. But, we must ask.

In the same way that we acknowledge our complete dependence on God for our daily needs, we must acknowledge that we are powerless against the forces of darkness. We acknowledge that by asking for help. Remember, we are at war. We must remind ourselves of that daily. And, we must ask for help against our enemy daily. We must never take on the Devil by ourselves.

OK. We have reassembled the pieces of the great work that we're calling our Lord's pattern for prayer. Now that we have reassembled the pieces of this great work, this pattern for prayer, we can talk about application. Before we do that, we need to discuss just one more thing: In the King James Translation, the pattern for prayer ends with the following words:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.
(Matthew 6:13 (KJV))

Those words don't appear in the New International Version that we normally read in our church. Why not? What we see here is something that's rare in the Bible. When the Bible writers wrote, all the way from Moses to the Apostles of Jesus, they wrote by hand. Then, others had to manually copy what the writers said. This is how everything that was written in ancient times came to us. The Bible is very unusual because the amount of copies we have is amazing. We have far more copies than any other ancient writings.

Now, when you make lots of copies by hand, you normally get mistakes. Another quality of the Bible writings is that these mistakes are uncommon. It's amazing how much accuracy there is in all of our copies. If a small mistake occurs, it's easy to see.

Let's compare that to the modern day. Imagine that we see a movie advertised on TV. "Pale Rider" with Clint Eastwood. Now, let's say that someone misspelled the title. They call it "Pail Rider". Is this a movie about a man who rides on buckets? In context, we can easily see that this was a small spelling error. That's what it's like with the Bible. There are occasional errors in copies, but they're usually easy to identify and correct.

Some of the copies we have of the Scriptures don't have a spelling error. They have one or more additional words. In these cases, we consider some things. To make a long story short, this is one of those cases. Some of our copies have the words, "Yours is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory, Amen". Some don't. So, when modern translators come along, they just make a note about this. In this case, the words appear to make perfect sense. So, many scholars include the words with a note. Others leave the words out, but put a footnote somewhere on the page indicating this. This will be important when we apply this pattern of prayer to our lives.

II. How should we apply this pattern of prayer to our lives?

OK. So having said all of this, let's talk now about application. How should we apply this pattern of prayer to our lives?

A. Recite, or not to recite

Should we recite it? I would say, yes.

Why is it that some groups recite this prayer and some don't? I think it's because many people want to be cautious about our Lord's warning. We are to avoid babbling. That is to say we are to avoid repeating words over and over again without engaging our minds. Some people are so concerned about this that the prayer is never recited. To me, that's being too cautious. It's "Throwing the baby out with the bath water." I would say that yes, we should recite this prayer. We should recite it daily. But, we must exert mental effort. We must keep our minds engaged.

B. Public or private?

Is this prayer meant to be recited in public, or in private? Both! Our Lord has instructed us that we should have times of private prayer where we find a solitary place and shut the door. It's perfectly fine to include this prayer. We also pray together in public. The pattern is appropriate there, too. I'm going to suggest that we re-start this practice in our church.

Here's what we need to do every day: Have a personal quiet time. Find a private place and shut the door. I start by singing a hymn. This helps me to focus. Recite the pattern for prayer once. Try to keep your mind engaged.

Then go back and recite it again. Only this time, let the pattern suggest categories. Stop and give some time to each of those categories.

When you pray “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name”, that’s a time for worship. Take some time to do that. When you get to the line, “Your kingdom come, your will be done”, ask that God would help you to do his will. “Give us this day our daily bread” means that we remember how fragile we are and how fragile our world is. Again, stop. Consider and reflect how utterly dependent we are on God. Thank God for his protection and provision, and ask that God would help you through another day. Ask God for wisdom concerning plans that extend past that day. Ask God for the proper attitude concerning future plans.

“Forgive us our debts” is a good time to ask God’s Holy Spirit to point out the sin in our lives, so we can confess and turn away. “As we forgive our debtors”, is a time to do just that. Instead of asking for revenge, ask that God will bless the people who have hurt us. Ask that God will reveal himself to them, just as he revealed himself to us.

Then ask for protection from our enemy the Devil. We remind ourselves that we must never face the Devil alone. We must ask for help from our savior Jesus, who already achieved victory. This is a good time to ask for God’s protection for others.

And finally yes, add, “Yours is the Kingdom, Yours is the Power, and Yours is the Glory forever, amen. We close by reminding ourselves that we are **not** building our own kingdom. We **are** asking for help to be part of God’s kingdom. We are **not** acting on our own power. We **are** relying on God’s power. We are **not** working for our own glory. We live to see God glorified. That is why we exist. That is our highest and best purpose.

Let’s pull this all together.

Conclusion

Our Lord Jesus wants his followers to lead effective lives. So, he gives us best practices. We have spent a number of sessions analyzing the pattern for prayer that our Lord has given to us. Today, we put it back together.

We’ve learned that effective prayer doesn’t mean we get whatever we want when we want it. Effective prayer means orienting ourselves towards God. It means participating in the process of restoration that our God wants for us. It means praying for the kingdom of God. It means having awareness of others around us.

If we will apply the best practices for prayer that our Lord gave us, Then we will be on the path to be effective followers of our Lord Jesus.

So, let's do it. Let's pray as our Lord taught us to pray:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’
Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.
Amen.”

Helpful Links

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com
