“AND FORGIVE US OUR SINS”

Luke 11:3,4

Key Verse: 11:4a

“…and forgive us our sins…”

 What do you pray for? Many pray for good weather, for good health, or basically, to be protected from suffering. Some people pray to be seen by others, or they heap up many words hoping God will somehow hear them (Mt6:5,7). Many aren’t very sure how to pray. The Bible tells us simply to tell God all our requests and ask him for whatever we wish (Php4:6; Jn15:7; 1Jn5:15). It’s especially good to pray based on his word, on what God teaches and promises us. All of these are called “free-form” prayers. On the other hand, there are formulaic prayers in which we repeat the words of others. Many in history have imitated the prayers of spiritually mature people, such as the famous prayer of St. Francis. But among all the form prayers ever prayed, the prayer of our Lord Jesus called “the Lord’s Prayer” may be the best. Based on this prayer he gave us, what should we be asking God for? And what does it mean to really pray this? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living words today.

 As we thought about in our study last week, when we begin our time of prayer reflecting on who God really is, we start to see our needs and problems in their proper perspective—they no longer look so desperate or overwhelming. Still, our Lord Jesus didn’t say that in prayer we only should be talking about God’s greatness and his great purposes. He also taught us to bring our personal needs to God. In verse 2a he said, “When you pray…” In Greek it literally says, “Whenever you pray…” The requests in this second half of the prayer are things we always should be mentioning to God. Put together, these prayer requests represent our physical, relational and spiritual needs. Jesus taught us that whenever we pray, we should be mentioning these personal needs to God.

Why do we need to pray like this? It’s because, in its essence, prayer is the way we actually depend on God. If we don’t tell God what we need, it means we’re trying to take care of everything by ourselves. This gets at the fundamental way we live: either we’re trying to be independent and do everything on our own, or, we’re learning how to depend on God. To depend on ourselves requires being smart, strong and able. To depend on God requires only one thing: faith, simple faith to trust God with our lives, our care and our protection. All throughout the Bible God invites his people to depend on him. There are some good reasons for us to do so. First of all, God is far wiser, far stronger, far more able than we are. He is so much more capable of taking care of our needs than we are. Secondly, learning to depend on God is the key element of our relationship with him. If we’re not really depending on God for our needs, then what kind of relationship do we have with him? We’ve all heard the people hostile to faith who say that God is like a crutch. It’s true that depending on God sometimes looks weak. But those who are depending on God are really the strongest people.

So how do we depend on God? We simply tell him about our needs. Of course he knows what we need even before we ask him (Mt6:8). Telling God isn’t to inform him, but to actually help *us* realize how much *we* need *him*. So to even begin to pray, we need to admit that *we* have *needs*. It tells us a vital point about prayer. Prayer involves humility. Some people, through prayer, try to prove how spiritual they are. They say a lot of lofty things or pray a lot for others and never mention anything genuinely personal. Many say, “I’m good!” or “I’m fine!” It’s kind of pretending. Some people find it too embarrassing to admit they need anything. But as human beings, we all have needs. Some people are more needy than others, but we human beings all share some basic needs. We all need food to survive. We all need to be close to God and close to others. And we all need God to keep us from temptation both outside us and within us. Let’s think briefly about what it means to pray for these things, and how we can do so.

**First**, daily bread. Let’s say verse 3 together. It’s interesting that among all our needs Jesus taught us to pray this first. The first step in depending on God is learning to depend on him for our material needs. It’s the most basic expression of faith and the area in which we all need the most training, just as the Israelites did (Ex16:4). “Daily bread” can mean daily spiritual food through the word of God (Mt4:4), but it also has the literal meaning of all our physical and material needs. Rich people already have all their physical needs met. They’ve most likely got a good-paying job, lots of money in the bank and plenty of food in the kitchen. So why ask God for what we already have? It’s because it’s so important to know that God is the One actually providing for us (1Ti6:17). In fact, God is the one keeping us alive each day. He’s the one who gives us our jobs, any material wealth we may have and all the food and water we’re always consuming. Asking God for our physical and material needs means acknowledging that without him we wouldn’t even survive, not even for a moment. Praying for daily bread may seem more real to poor people who aren’t sure how they’re going to eat each day. They really mean this prayer. But whether God in his sovereign wisdom chooses to make us rich or poor, we all need to be serious about acknowledging God as our Provider and Sustainer, and we all need to grow in dependence on him. The beautiful words of Proverbs 30:8,9 remind us of this: “Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.” Honestly a lot of people are praying hard to get rich. We all want lots of money to feel secure, to take care of our loved ones, to enjoy the good life and to make all kinds of great plans. We don’t realize that before God our lives are only a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes (Jas4:14). The Bible teaches us that a strong desire for money can cause us to wander from the faith (1Ti6:10). So it’s better to just ask God for daily bread, meaning just enough for each day. We may think it’s unspiritual and too petty to be praying about daily food or money. But our Lord Jesus taught us to do it. He also used the word “our” daily bread. He wants us not to be selfish but to be genuinely concerned and praying for our Christian brothers and sisters and their material needs as well as our own.

**Second**, forgiveness. Let’s say verse 4 together. Just as we need daily bread for our bodies, so we need daily forgiveness for our souls. The truth is, through our faith in Jesus God has already forgiven us of all our sins, past, present and future. So why should we always be asking God to forgive our sins? Doesn’t that suggest a lack of faith? No, this prayer request is speaking to our daily walk with God. The Apostle John wrote a letter to the early Christians encouraging them to walk in God’s light, in fellowship with God and with one another. It may sound like beautiful poetry, but it’s not so easy to do. To walk in God’s light means to acknowledge that even though I believe in Jesus, I still sin, in all kinds of ways. Sometimes I may commit a gross sin, but most of the time I commit lesser sins. There are sins of commission, which I’m usually aware of, and then sins of omission, things I should have done but didn’t, and most often I’m not aware of these. We need God’s light to show us our sins. So King David prayed, “Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults” (Ps19:12). To walk in God’s light means not to ignore my sins but confess them to God every day and really ask for the blood of Jesus to cleanse and purify me (1Jn1:5–10). Asking God each day to forgive me both for the sins I’m aware of and for those I’m not will keep me in close fellowship with him. It will teach me to depend each day only on God’s grace to me in Jesus. People try to pay for their sins or make up for their wrongdoing in various ways. Underneath what seems like sincerity is actually pride. Each day I need to learn to humbly ask for God’s forgiveness in Jesus. The more I learn to ask for his forgiveness, the more I can be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2Ti2:1).

 To this prayer for forgiveness Jesus added, “…for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (4). He taught us the same thing back in 6:37: “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven…” Of course we don’t earn forgiveness by trying to forgive others; only accepting what Jesus did for us on the cross gives us God’s forgiveness. But there’s a sense in which how we treat others is how God will treat us. If we’re always criticizing, judging and condemning others, maybe not even verbally but only in our hearts, we may be surprised one day to find out that that is how God will be treating us. Holding grudges is a very common problem even among believers. So is feeling like others are indebted to me. How can we forgive when we feel so hurt, so wronged, so used? The only way is when the grace of Jesus fills our souls. His grace heals our minds and hearts. His grace enables us to forgive from our hearts, and forgive really *anything*. In his grace we can see what used to seem like great offenses as things too small even to mention (Mt7:3). “…for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (4). With these words I believe our Lord Jesus is teaching us to ask God’s help to forgive those we need to forgive. Just as we sin every day, the people around us also sin against us every day. So whenever we pray, we need to be asking God to help us forgive.

 There are so many things we think we need. We need more power to do great things, more wisdom, more courage. But Jesus teaches us to pray for more forgiveness. Philip Yancey wrote in his famous book *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* that we’re living in a world of “ungrace.” Companies force us to pay back everything we owe them, down to the penny. People expect us to pay them back if we took anything or damaged anything they own. What’s worse, if we fail morally or spiritually, people don’t want to accept us ever again. They treat us like damaged goods. This unforgiveness can become generational. So many people are harboring grudges and bitterness for what others have done to them. Many are demanding their rights and restitution. It may be the prayer topic our world needs most, to pray, “…and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.”

**Third**, temptation. Let’s say the last part of verse 4 together: “And lead us not into temptation.” This is again a very humble prayer. To pray this means to admit that I can’t handle temptation on my own; I really need God’s help. There are many kinds of temptation: the temptations of food or drink or physical pleasure are most commonly thought of. These are the temptations that Satan uses on us because of our lack of self-control (1Co7:5b). But there are also the temptations of power and glory in this world, as well as the temptation to compromise spiritually. There’s the temptation to turn away from God’s will when it seems too hard. There is even the temptation to test God. We can see all these temptations in the life of our Lord Jesus himself (4:1–13). Where do these temptations come from? James 1:13–15 says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings death.” According to this, temptation more often than not comes not from without us, but from within. So to pray, “And lead us not into temptation” is a prayer for God to save us from ourselves and our own sinful desires. Only when we include this request in our prayers can we stay spiritually alert (Lk22:46).

 Let’s read verses 3–4 again. May God help us learn to depend on him humbly in prayer. May God teach us first of all to trust him each day for our physical and material needs. May he help us each day to pray for his forgiveness and for his help to forgive others. May he help us each day to pray especially not to be led into temptation. When we learn to pray like this each day, may God make us spiritually healthy and strong, and useful to him in his kingdom work.