

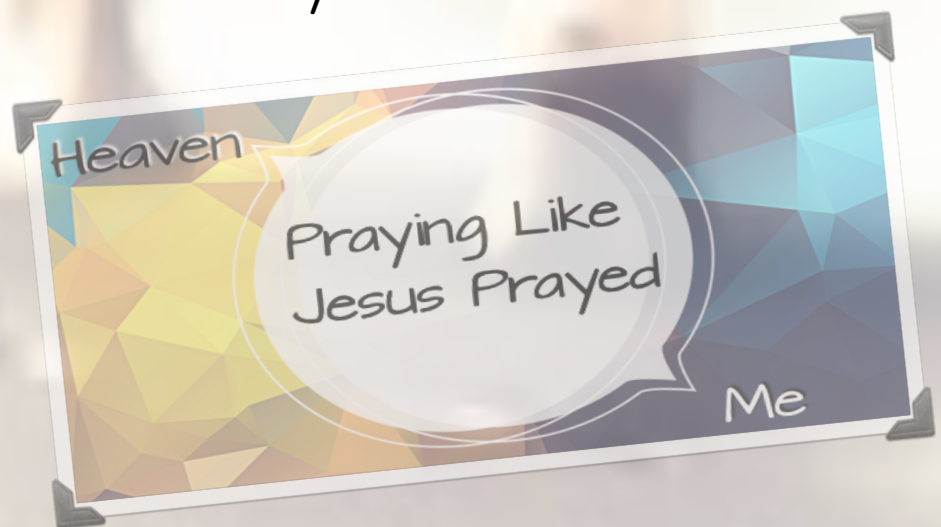
March 13-17, 2023 Edition

The Year^(s) Of ^{Following} Jesus Part 63

How Should We Pray?

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

March 11/12, 2023



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday:

Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray. Luke 11 (NLT)

So when you pray, you should pray like this: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name always be kept holy. May your kingdom come and what you want be done here on earth as it is in heaven. Give us the food we need for each day. Forgive us for our sins, just as we have forgiven those who sinned against us. And do not cause us to be tempted, but save us from the Evil One.' The kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours forever. Amen. Matthew 6:9-13 (NCV)

Reflection: So we're in week 5 of a series looking at what it takes to live the kind of life God blesses. It's all based on the idea that God only shares His power, glory, strength & presence with those who are actively engaged in the development of the character of His Son. To share His power with someone that did not share Jesus' character would be a dangerous combination.

So what does it take to design the kind of life God blesses? We've talked about the importance of community. We've talked about the concept of using God as a GPS to guide your movements and thoughts as you go throughout a typical day. Then we looked at the importance of the Bible, especially as it relates to hearing from God and making sure that the messages you're receiving are really from God. This week we'll continue with what is probably the most important thing you can do to plug into God's power. Prayer.

When Jesus' friends asked Him to teach them how to pray He gave them a model prayer. Millions of people recite this prayer on a fairly regular basis throughout the world, at church, at recovery meetings or in their own private lives. But if we only see the Lord's Prayer as a prayer to be memorized and recited verbatim we are missing the true power behind the prayer that Jesus taught.

So get ready. We're going to go through Jesus' model prayer and learn how we can take the concepts in the Lord's Prayer and use them as a framework for creating our own prayer lists. Lists that we can use to pray on a daily basis in less than 5 minutes for the things that will truly change our lives.

But prepare yourself... Jesus' model prayer isn't just a series of pithy motivational slogans to make you feel good. This prayer has a way of opening your eyes to see the reality of life... similar to the red pill Neo swallowed in The Matrix that allowed him to see reality instead of the illusion that he had been subjected to all his life. This prayer is a radical way to look at your life that will open you up to the power of God but in so doing will also take you places and make you see things about yourself that you would probably just as soon not face. So the choice is yours... choose the blue pill and stay in the matrix blissfully unaware, or choose to see things the way God sees them, the way they really are.

Prayer: Father, today I choose to swallow the metaphorical red pill that will open my eyes up to Your reality... and how You see me. I know it won't be instantaneous like it was in The Matrix but today I ask You to open my eyes and show me things about myself that

I may be blissfully unaware of so that as I become more like Your Son, Your power will flow through my life. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Tuesday:

Our Father in heaven. Matthew 6:10 (NCV)

Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.

Matthew 6:5-6 (MES)

Reflection: According to Jesus, prayer should start with God. Makes sense I guess... since He's the One I'm praying to. Jesus opens His model prayer by addressing God as, Father, and expressing His desire to always honor His Name.

Jews didn't really address God as their Father in the first century. It was actually unheard of. But Jesus comes along and in His prayer lets us know that God is a loving father who can be trusted. In the sermon on the mount (which is when Jesus gave this model prayer) Jesus spent a lot of time talking about God as our Father. He stressed that we could trust God to always do the right thing for us. To give us the best... even when we've asked for something that might not be good for us.

So as we start our prayer list, try and think of a way to express that feeling when you start your prayers. I use the Bible to remind me of God's love for me in my prayer list. Here's one verse that gives me the picture of God that Jesus wants me to have as I go to Him in prayer:

The Lord is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust. Psalm 103:8-14

Now I'm ready to talk to God about who I am and what I (think) I need. But I don't start off with my needs right off the bat. Jesus puts that part of prayer a few steps down. There are a couple of other things I need to do according to this model prayer, before I'm ready to talk about what I want.

One thing that helps me is to add a list of the things I'm thankful for to this step. It's not expressly demonstrated here in Jesus' model prayer but what I've learned is that if I start my prayer off focusing on God as my Father and then spend some time reflecting on the things my generous Father has blessed me with, then I'm ready to start working on some of the tough stuff that's coming if I follow Jesus' model prayer.

So for today, spend a few minutes thinking about the things you're grateful for. Write them down. Then thank God for those things. This is the first section of your prayer list.

I'll make a list of God's gracious dealings, all the things God has done that need praising.
Isaiah 63:7 (MES)

Things I'm Grateful For:

Prayer: Father, thank You for Your generosity to me. I have so many things to be grateful for. Never let me live a day that I don't notice the good things in my life and thank You for them. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

May your name always be kept holy. May your kingdom come and what you want be done, here on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:10 (NCV)

Reflection: This next section of Jesus' prayer is where things start to get dicy. At least they get dicy if you really understand what it is Jesus is suggesting that you (and I) pray. In the translations of the Lord's prayer that most of us have memorized the second line of the prayer is, "hallowed be Your Name." Ever wondered what "hallowed" means? It's a tough word to translate. Sometimes it will be translated as "holy" and sometimes as "honored". So now does that clear everything up for you? No? Me neither. I spent a lot of time trying to understand what it means for God's Name to always be honored or kept holy and I think I know now why it was always hard for me to figure out- I was lumping the second line of the Lord's prayer together with the first line (our Father Who is in heaven) instead of lumping it in with the second line (Your Kingdom come...). When I started viewing "may Your Name always be honored" with the third line of the prayer it suddenly made a lot more sense (at least to me) but let's wait to talk about the second line of the prayer until we have a firm grasp on the third line of the prayer- the prayer for God's Kingdom.

We often think of God's kingdom as some far away geographical place (even if that place is located in some other realm or dimension) that we'll go to after we die (at least we hope we get to go ;o) But that's not the way Jesus talked about it. He'd say things like this:

"Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" Matthew 3:2

Some of the Pharisees asked Jesus, "When will the kingdom of God come?" Jesus answered, "God's kingdom is coming, but not in a way that you will be able to see with your eyes. People will not say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' because God's kingdom is within you." Luke 17:20-21

Basically what Jesus teaches us about God's kingdom is that it's something that moves around. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus asks us to pray that the kingdom would "come". And that God's "will" (what He wants to be done) would be done here on earth just as it's done in Heaven. So I have a question for you. How is God's will done in Heaven? Perfectly, right? What God wants... that's what happens. Ok so question number two is, how well is God's will done here on earth? Not too good, huh? Sin by it's very definition is when we as human beings do things that are outside of God's will. Even if all we did was look at our own individual lives (which is really what Jesus is asking us to do here) God's will is done pretty pitifully down here on earth. So what is Jesus asking us to pray for? Basically I think this part of the prayer could be summed up by saying,

Let Your kingdom come, and let it begin with me.

The only place you have any control over whether or not God's will is done on this earth is in your own life. You can't force anyone else to live according to God's will. You only have limited control over yourself... what hope is there of controlling someone else. So Jesus asks us to pray, every day, for surrender. Our own surrender. What a terrifying thought. Surrender to God's plan? Give up my own agenda? How can I possibly do that? How can I trust that God will do what's best for me?

That's why Jesus' model prayer starts with immersing ourselves in how good a Father God is to us. How He wants nothing but the best for us. That He can be trusted. So that when we get to this REALLY scary part of the prayer we will have the basis and foundation of trust that is required to surrender your plans to God. Is it easy? Nope. And guess what? Even when you think you've surrendered everything to God you will constantly find areas that you have held back and God let you remain blissfully unaware until you were ready to face them. God knows how much you and I can handle and will open our eyes to areas we need to surrender when the time is exactly right for us:

Remember, The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust.
Psalm 103

This is the next part of your prayer list. Spend a few minutes thinking about what areas of your life you are having a tough time surrendering. God's not looking for you to be perfect at this right away. Be honest with Him. Tell Him what things you're scared of letting go of. Instead of saying, "I WILL NEVER SURRENDER (fill in the blank)! say something like, "Lord, I have no idea how I'm going to surrender this... can you show me the way? Remember that as you learn how to be more and more like Jesus, God will open your life up to more and more of His power. And when that happens you will start to be able to do things you never thought you could do. Things you never could do.

And that brings us back to the second line of the prayer- may Your Name always be honored/kept holy. Now when I see that line here's how I read it:

May Your Name always be honored with/in/because of my life.

In other words- I want God's Name to be honored because of my life. I want His Kingdom to be such an integral part of my life that people see God in my every day existence. I'm not always so good at making that happen but it's my goal. Every once in a while I tell you about a song that means a great deal to me and that is a goal for me. Lately I've been listening quite a lot to a song by Sidewalk Prophets called, "I Want To Live Like That." For me that's what this second and third line of the Lord's prayer means- I want to live the way Jesus did by praying every day- "may Your Name always be honored because of my life. Let Your Kingdom come and let it begin with me."

So for today I hope you'll spend some time thinking about the areas of your life that are difficult to let go of and maybe some of the areas of your life that don't bring honor to God's Name. I don't know what will be hard for you to let go of at this point in the prayer. Maybe it's a habit, a behavior, an emotion. Whatever it is, talk to God about what it might take to surrender that to Him. Ask for His help.

Things I Need To Surrender: _____

Prayer: Father, I know there are things in my life that I need to surrender to You. I honestly don't know how to give them up and never return to them. I also know there are things in my life that I don't even realize I'm holding back. Open my eyes to those things when You think the time is right. And Lord, today I want to live my life in such a way that Your Name is honored because of what others see in me. Show me how to do that. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday:

Give us the food we need for each day. Matthew 6:11 (NCV)

You don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. James 4:3 (NLT)

Reflection: So... now we're to the part of the list that will likely take up most of the space on your prayer list. Your requests. Jesus waits until now to have you ask for what you need/want so that you will be properly grounded before you ask. You've reminded yourself of Who God is and that He can be trusted. You've gone over a list of all the stuff you're grateful for that God has given you. You've also aligned your will with His and

surrendered your plan to His. So now... go ahead and ask. But, what if God thinks I'm selfish? Do you think He doesn't already know that? You can't hide anything from Him so you might as well ask for what you want. Just don't expect this to be your cosmic fulfillment list that you had to God and then think (cause who would actually say this out loud?), "come on, Lord, step on it! I need that stuff and I need it yesterday!"

But we make a mistake when we don't ask at all. When we try to put on this sort of pseudo spiritual mask and pretend we don't want what we want. Go ahead and ask. But finish each request up with a disclaimer... What kind of disclaimer you ask? Well there are several that I use. Some people would say they're a cop out because I end up dropping all the responsibility on God but I'm pretty sure He can handle it. It seems like that was what the last section of the prayer was all about... surrender to God's plan instead of my own. So I use a couple of disclaimers in my prayers based on some of my favorite scriptures. The first one is based on this scripture that I focus on when I can't control a situation:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank him for his answers. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:6-7 (NCV)

When I can't control a situation and I'm stressing out over it I recite Philippians 4 and then tell God,

"I'm giving this to You."

When I do that a couple of things happen. First I invite God into a situation that I feel like is out of control. When I talk to God about things that are out of my control I invite Him into that situation. And when I really think about it... He's the only One who has any control over the situation at all. Secondly I experience God's peace. There are nights when the only thing that allows me to sleep is repeating the phrase, "I'm giving this to You, Lord." Another disclaimer I use when I don't even know what to ask God for is based on this scripture:

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will.
Romans 8:26-27 (NLT)

The Bible says that even if all I can do is groan, then God's spirit will speak for me in the groanings- and this is the best part- in harmony with God's will. There are plenty of times in my life when I have no clue what to pray for that I just say, "Lord, do the best thing for everyone involved in this situation... even though I have no idea what that will look like." Judy and I started doing this years ago when we read a study that had been conducted on the power of prayer. The study looked at the effects of prayer on bacteria. They took samples of the same kind of bacteria and then took a group of people who all believed in the power of prayer. They had one group of people pray that the bacteria would flourish. They had one group pray against the bacteria and ask God to curse the bacteria. Then they

had another group simply pray that God would do the best thing for the bacteria. What were the results, you ask? The bacteria that had people praying against it did the worst. Not much growth there. But the bacteria that did the best wasn't the bacteria that had people praying that it would flourish- it was the bacteria that had people praying that God would do the best thing for the bacteria whatever that might look like. Strange, huh? What does it mean? I'm not exactly sure but I know this- when I pray that God will do the best thing for me (or for you) whatever that might look like things happen. Now Judy and I will often say, "do the best thing for the bacteria, Lord" when we're praying for ourselves or even for some of you. Sorry... we don't really think you're bacteria (at least not most of you ;o) but it gets a point across to us that we really don't know what the best thing is very often. I can't tell you how many miracles I've witnessed when I turn to God and say, "help... I have no clue what to ask for". Another disclaimer I use is for situations that I think (emphasis on the word, "think") I know what the best thing to ask for is. In those situations I use this scripture:

With God's power working in us, God can do much, much more than anything we can ask or imagine. Ephesians 3:20 (NLT)

I always finish my prayers up with this concept. I ask for what I want/need but then I realize that God might have something even better in mind. So I ask and then say, "but don't let me get in Your way, Lord. Do even more than I could have possibly hoped for or even imagined in my wildest dreams. Now a word of warning here- submitting to God's will even in the things I ask for might not lead to a place you will enjoy. Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane that He might just avoid the whole cross/suffering/dying/carrying the sins of the world into hell process that He was dreading but finished up His prayer with, "not my will but your will be done." And how did God honor His prayer? By taking Him straight into the very thing He asked God to spare Him from. Why? It was best for everyone- best for us and best for Jesus. By going through His worst Nightmare it gave Him His greatest dream- an eternity with His children. So go ahead and ask away but always finish your asking with Jesus' prayer, "not my will but Yours be done." And finally, I use this scripture when I see nothing but darkness and can't see how God could make anything beautiful out of a situation:

And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans. Romans 8:28 (TLB)

If you haven't been in one of these situations then you need to be ready when one comes... because they always come. In these situations I ask that God will make something beautiful out of these crummy circumstances. So your homework for today is to make a list of the things you want to ask God for on a daily basis. Make sure and write them down because what you'll find is that as God's power flows into your life and you start to see your prayers answered you'll have new things to add to your gratitude list that you made under the first section of your prayer list... and it will remind you every day of God's faithfulness and that He can be trusted.

Things I Am Asking For: _____

Prayer: Father, help me to want the same things that You want. Until that day comes, I will ask for what I think I need and want and trust that you, as a loving Father, will only give me what will truly be good for me. Thank You in advance for what I know you will do. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

Forgive us for our sins, just as we have forgiven those who sinned against us.
Matthew 6:12 (NCV)

In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do. You can't get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others. If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God's part. Matthew 6:14-15 (MES)

Reflection: Today we are talking about forgiveness. God's forgiveness towards us, and our forgiveness towards others. This is one of the hardest parts of this prayer but it is absolutely essential if I'm going to experience God's power and presence. This part of the prayer is a lot like the second part... it's all about surrender. Yes... I know... surrender again?!?! This time I surrender my pride and ask for forgiveness for the wrongs I've committed. And then I surrender my right to get even and to hold on to bitterness and resentment when others hurt me.

I'm not going to talk a lot about forgiveness other than to point out that Jesus says it's the bridge to the Father's forgiveness. If you burn down the bridge of forgiveness to other people that have wronged you, then you have burned down the very bridge over which you yourself must cross to be forgiven. So this is serious business. If this is something you are struggling with talk to someone you trust. I (Pastor Ed) love to sit down and help people who are genuinely seeking God's will in their lives to find the direction and hope we all need to survive. And I will recommend two books on forgiveness for you to read if this is something you struggle with. The first is a fictional book about a man spending the weekend with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It's called The Shack and it's the story of a man getting to talk with God about all of his questions and how even when he doesn't always get answers he learns the most important thing about God that we can know- that God cares and God is in control even when it doesn't look like it.

The other book is non fiction and is called Explaining The Importance Of Forgiveness by John Arnott. I think at this point pretty much have to read it on Kindle or iBooks. This little book changed my life and many others who have read it. It's not an easy concept to deal with but it's often the most important concept we can wrestle with because nothing will short circuit my relationship with the Father faster and more completely than bitterness and unforgiveness. I know it's hard but really the more we hold onto the things that others have done to us the more power we give them over our future- let that sink in

for a minute and make you good and angry (but not at them... get angry at the sin of bitterness and unforgiveness and then give it all to God).

But for today, sit down and think of what you need to be forgiven for (you may need more paper ;o) and then make a list of the people you need to forgive. Maybe you'll need to actually talk to them and let them know you've forgiven them, maybe not. But make the list and then mentally let go of your right to hold onto the bitterness and resentment that their actions have left in you. It will take time, but if you're struggling with it then say, "Lord, I don't know how I'm going to forgive them... help me to make this happen," instead of "I WILL NEVER FORGIVE THEM." God can work with pleas for help. What it's tough for Him to work with is blanket statements of rejection of the concept of forgiveness. Again... talk to someone if this is something you struggle with, please.

Forgive Me For: _____

People I Need To Forgive: _____

Prayer: Father, I ask for Your forgiveness for the things that I've done and continue to do that require Your forgiveness. And I ask You for the power and grace that I will need to forgive those who have hurt me. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Saturday:

And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.
Matthew 6:13 (NLT)

The kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours forever. Amen. Matthew 6:13 (NCV)

Reflection: The prayer ends with two sections. First off the instruction to ask for help with our temptations. That one's pretty self explanatory. Ask for help with the things you're struggling with. What areas are you having a tough time surrendering to God (from section 2)? What things do you continue to do that require God's forgiveness? Are you struggling with a habit or a hangup or an emotion or a relationship that you know isn't honoring to God? Then ask for help.

But the way the prayer ends is fascinating to me. He reminds us that the kingdom is God's. Reminds us of our need to surrender AGAIN (thanks for that, Lord... I think...). Then He mentions God's power. The power that only flows into our lives if we've surrendered to God's plan. The power that will bring miracles into our lives. The power that is the only way to see God's glory in our lives. Jesus reminds us that all three, the kingdom, the power and the glory, they all belong to God.

But (and as my friend is fond of saying, this is a REALLY BIG but ;o), God wants so desperately to share. Let Him. Pray the prayer. For your final exercise here's what I encourage you to do. Write out your own personal paraphrase of this prayer. What does each line really mean for you in your life right now? By paraphrasing the Lord's prayer and then making a prayer list that will allow you to really focus on what you have to give thanks for, what you need help turning over to Him, what the things you (think) you want/need are, what you need to be forgiven for and who you need to forgive, what temptations you struggle with the most and then again reminding yourself Who God is and who you are and what that says about this conversation that we call prayer you will start to experience God in a way you've never experienced Him before and that will change everything in your life (over time)- I guarantee it.

Temptations I need help with: _____

My Personal Paraphrase Of The Lord's Prayer: _____

Pastor Ed's Paraphrase Of The Lord's Prayer: My Father Who is in ultimate control of everything, may Your Name be honored today because of my life. Let Your Kingdom come and let it begin with me. Give me today the things that are going to be best for me. And forgive me for the times I've fallen (and continue to fall) short exactly the same way I forgive those who have hurt me. Turn my eyes away from the things that tempt me to go astray and give me the grace to keep my eyes focused on You and protect me from the attacks of the devil. And remind me again to let Your Kingdom come and for it to begin today in my own life in some small way knowing that the Kingdom is Yours, the glory belongs to You and the power only comes from You as I submit to Your plans for me and everyone else on this planet. Amen

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, may your name always be kept holy. May your kingdom come and what you want be done here on earth as it is in heaven. Give us the food we need for each day. Forgive us for our sins, just as we have forgiven those who sinned against us. And do not cause us to be tempted, but save us from the Evil One.' The kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours forever. Amen. Matthew 6:9-13 (NCV)