

The Prayer God Always Answers
A Series on the Ministry of Prayer: Part 2 (Ronald Dunn)

This series of lectures was presented in October 1979 by Ronald Dunn (Lifestyle Ministries / Rondunn.com) at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary's Bueermann-Champion Lectureship. The series is notable for its emphasis on intercession.

Will you open your Bibles this morning to the Gospel of Matthew chapter six? I want us to begin reading with verse five through verse thirteen:

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: 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. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. (Matt 6:5-13)

Several years ago, I was visiting with a missionary on furlough from Brazil, and he was telling about a letter he received from a little girl whose Sunday School class had taken on as a class project the writing of foreign missionaries. He said evidently their Sunday School teacher had informed the little girls how busy real, live missionaries were, and that they probably would not be able to answer the letter they received, he said, because this particular letter he received said this:

*Dear Reverend Smith:
We are praying for you. We are not expecting an answer.*

Now you know that little girl, without realizing it, pretty well summed up the prayer life of the average believer. We are praying but we are not expecting an answer. You see, the fact is that we are more surprised when God answers than when He doesn't answer. I am not surprised when I go into my room at night and turn on the lights and they come on. I am not surprised when I turn on the key and hit the starter and the automobile starts. It is supposed to. I am more surprised when it doesn't, and by the same token, you and I ought not to be surprised when God does answer prayer. But the fact of the matter is, we are. And we are not too terribly surprised when He doesn't answer, for we have become accustomed to living with that situation of unanswered prayer.

One of the tragedies is that we have come to terms with it. We have made peace with it. We have so accepted the fact that there are times perhaps when we find God in an answering mood and there are times when we find Him not in an answering mood – a great mystery – but most of us are content to live with that kind of attitude. Now while the Bible does admit unanswered prayer, it never assumes it. And one can read the Bible and come away with this clear conviction that the Word of God expects us to pray and expects us to receive an answer when we do pray. The normal, natural prayer life is a prayer life that is answered. And the Bible knows nothing, as far as I can tell, the Bible knows nothing of **prayer simply for prayer's sake**. I have tried in the last few years to read every book I could find on prayer. I will admit that there are some who emphasize prayer for prayer's sake. In other words, the value of prayer is what it does for you – how good it makes you feel, or sort of a "pulling-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps." But you'll not find that emphasis in the Word of God. Now I do believe that prayer is good for you. I started to say, I believe that prayer always makes you feel good, but sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes real prayer makes you feel the opposite. There is a value in prayer for what it does for you, but what I am saying is that the Biblical emphasis is that we are to pray in order that God may answer.

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All the great prayer promises of the Bible, those encouragements that the Lord gives us to pray, emphasize that we are to pray expecting God to do something dramatically, specifically, consistently in answer to our prayer. As one man has said, "In prayer the name of the game is answers." And I believe that is half-true. The name of the game, as I said yesterday, is not so much that we may receive what we've asked for but that God may be glorified in giving it to us. But that does not deny the point that the Bible emphasizes that you and I pray that we are to expect God to answer, specifically and consistently.

"An Attitude of Faith"

Well, no wonder the disciples then prayed, "Lord, teach us to pray," because I think that there are very few things in the Christian life that are more vital to us than prayer. The key to the vault of all that God has for us is this belief in prayer, this belief, this attitude of faith that expresses itself in prayer. Perhaps all of us in one way or another have at times prayed something like the disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray." I never feel an inadequate as when I come to the place of prayer.

I have been preaching since I was fifteen years old, nearly twenty years now! After a while, one of your great problems is that you begin to take it for granted. But you know, there is something that I have never taken for granted in my Christian life, and that's prayer. No matter how much time I spend in it, no matter how much I have studied it, I never feel as inadequate as when I come to the Lord in a time of prayer. There is that certain something about prayer that remains a mystery and there is that certain feeling of inferiority, of inadequacy, of ignorance in the heart of most believers that I know anything about when they approach the throne of grace. All of us, I think, constantly have this prayer in the depths of our heart, "Lord, teach us to pray."

I have good news for you. That's one prayer I believe the Lord will answer. I want us this morning to look at that answer and how the Lord teaches us to pray. I believe in prayer there are basically two problems and every other problem that we confront in prayer, I think, can be marshalled under one of these two headings.

The two great problems are: 1) **how** to pray, and 2) for **what** to pray. The manner of our praying: how should we go about it and what should be the content of our prayer? What is legitimate in prayer? For what can we honestly ask God? What to pray for and how to pray. I believe the Lord has answered both of these questions and confronted both of these problems in the passage that is before us this morning. We are just going to take this passage. I am calling this "The Prayer that God Always Answers." This is the kind of praying, I believe, the Bible teaches will always bring from God the answer.

How to Pray

Before we get into that, I think it would be good for us to examine the structure of this passage, and so let me just give you an outline of this passage. In this particular passage, Jesus deals with, I believe, two major problems in praying. The problem of the hypocrite and the problem of the heathen. Those are the two basic problems that we will find in our prayer life. First of all, in this passage, Jesus tells us how not to pray, and then He gives us the reason for not praying that way and then He tells us how to pray, so as to miss that problem and to correct that "error."

First of all, He says that we are not to "pray like the hypocrites." Verses five and six, "These," He says, "and when thou prayest thou shall not be as hypocrites." That is the negative. We are not to pray as the hypocrites. They pray to be seen of men. **We are not to pray to be seen of men.** The reason is that when we do that we already have our reward. The right way to pray is this, "Thou shalt pray to thy Father in secret." First of all, He says, "Don't pray to be seen of men. The reason is you have your reward. The way to pray is pray to thy Father in secret."

Then He tells us we are not to pray like the heathen. The reason we are not to pray like the heathen is because our Father already knows of what we have need, and the way we are to pray is to pray specifically. He said, "After this

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manner, therefore, pray ye.” So first of all, do not pray like the hypocrites to be seen of men because they already have their reward. To correct that we are to pray in secret. Secondly, don't pray like the heathen, as they think they will be heard for their ***much praying***. But, your Father already knows what you need. The correct way to prayer is given there in the model prayer.

Now there is something of the hypocrite and the heathen in all of us in our praying. The hypocrite perverts the purpose of prayer. The heathen misunderstands the nature of prayer. The hypocrite prays to impress people. The heathen prays to impress God. The hypocrite's sin is committed deliberately and the heathen's sin is, I believe, committed ignorantly. But all of us pray a little like the hypocrite and a little like the heathen, and so Jesus is striking at these two main problems in prayer. We are not to pray like the hypocrite trying to impress people and we are not to pray like the heathen who is trying to impress God. So that will give us a little bit of the structure of this passage.

Four Attributes of Prayer

Now I want us to move into the main body of the message this morning. There are four things that I would like to suggest to you that make up what I believe the kind of praying that God answers. First of all, Jesus tells us that if we are going to pray, and pray aright, we must pray with sincerity. The first consideration in all praying that God honors, and that God hears is that it must be a prayer of sincerity, a prayer of honesty, a prayer of openness. He said, “Don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners. They pray to be seen of men.” The purpose of their prayer is to impress men with their spirituality.

It is a remarkable thing. Here the holiest act that a man can engage in is prayer. I don't care whatever else you may do, as a believer, there is nothing more sacred, nothing holier than when you come into the presence of God, approach the throne of grace. That is the highest act that I believe a man can engage in. The staggering truth is that even in the holiest of moments, sin can intrude. Here the very highest act that a man can do, yet Jesus has to caution him even in this holiest of acts, because there sin can intrude. A man can take the holiest of acts and make it an occasion for sin. So He says, “Be careful. Be careful when you pray that you pray with the right motive and that you do not pray to be seen of men.”

I do not believe that Jesus is condemning prayer in public. I don't believe that. I think what He is condemning is praying to be seen of men. Public praying, I think, of course, is more vulnerable to the hypocritical praying. I was in a conference some time ago. The chairman of that conference had a reputation for his beautiful platform prayers. As a matter of fact, before meeting the man, I had heard about his prayers. (Let me hasten to say that when you lead in public prayer, I see nothing at all wrong with giving some thought to it and some attention to it. I am not one of those who believe in writing it down and reading it off, but I believe that there is a ministry, especially in the pastoral prayer, to make prayer understandable and to give some thought, care, and attention to it. But, there is a “fine line” over which you can cross and it becomes a “platform performance” instead of a ***real prayer***.) These people would talk about this brother's beautiful prayers in his presence. It would become that he was weaving a tapestry of beautiful sounding phrases and it literally turned into a performance. There is a real danger of our praying in public to be seen of men, in order that people might be impressed with our spirituality.

Do we begin to think of prayer as a status symbol, a spiritual symbol? I have always been intrigued by people who really knew how to pray. Haven't you? I used to read these books of men like George Muller and Praying Hyde and there was just something about them. I think even our private praying can be done as a hypocrite. For instance, it would be mighty difficult for you to spend the whole night in prayer and not tell somebody you did it, wouldn't it? ***Pray with sincerity***. There is no time when you and I must be as totally honest with God and open and sincere in our motives as when we come in the presence of God. one of the interesting things about prayer is that as one man has said, “What a man is when he is alone with God, that's what he is.”

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I can preach and not be right with God. I can; I have done it. I can witness to a person and not be right with God. I can teach and not be right with God. But I cannot really honestly pray, truly pray without being right with God. Because that is not a man-to-man encounter. That is a man-to-God encounter, and I am dealing with one who knows me better than I know myself, to whom all things are open and naked. Jesus said: If you are going to come into the presence of God, you must come with absolute sincerity, openness of heart and purity of motive. First of all, we must pray with sincerity.

Pray Sincerely and Secretly

How do you pray with sincerity? Man, that's hard. I find it **very** difficult. How do you do it? Well, there is a way. Jesus says, in order to pray with sincerity, you need to pray in secrecy. And that's the second point. **We must pray in secrecy.** You see the hypocrisy of verse five is corrected by the secrecy of verse six. Someone has said, "The secret of religion is religion in secret." Jesus says in verse six, "But thou when thou prayest, enter into thy closet and thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Now the secrecy of which He is speaking is not so much a physical secrecy. I don't believe that we ought to lock ourselves in a closet and never pray in public. I think He is talking about a far greater secrecy than that. It is a mental and spiritual secrecy. The key is in the phrase, "Pray to thy Father."

Actually, you can pray in secret even when you are praying in public. This kind of prayer, I believe, is a prayer that concentrates on the presence of God. We are more aware of God's presence than we are aware of anyone else's presence. It is focusing our heart's attention on our Heavenly Father – in a very real way shutting out the world and praying as though there were no one else in the universe except my Father and myself. Pray to thy Father which is in secret.

Sometimes we don't pray to our Father. Have you ever noticed the tendency to use prayer as a means of preaching? Do you have family prayers at home with your children? Have you ever prayed like this? "And, dear Lord, help Johnny to pick up his clothes and put them in the dirty clothes hampers and help Bill to get the yard mowed this week because my mother and dad are coming to spend a weekend with us and I want the yard looking real nice, and help Susie to make up her bed."

You know what I'm saying. You use that time of prayer, sort of preach to the family, instead of praying to the Father. I have heard some pastors do this. They use that sacred moment of prayer to get in a few announcements, as you might say. There is a sense in which sometimes in our praying we are more conscious of the people that are surrounding us and we find ourselves actually praying to the people. For instance, have you been called upon to lead a prayer? Maybe there have been two or three people that have been leading in prayer and the first fellow got up, and man, he prayed a rousing prayer and everyone "amen-ed" while he was praying. Do you all do that out here? And, maybe the next person that go up to lead in prayer, he prayed a vigorous prayer and the people would "amen" him all during his prayer. And then you got up to pray and nobody "amen-ed" at all through your prayer – nobody was "amen-ing" – and so you start to praying in one direction – maybe this will get an "amen" out of them. Then you move into another direction. Suddenly you become very conscious of the people. You find yourself praying to impress people. How do you do that? You pray in secrecy. Praying to thy Father. Concentrating upon thy Father. I said a moment ago that Jesus was not referring primarily to physical secrecy, although I do believe that physical secrecy is important. I believe that Jesus practiced that prayer in secret. May I just say to you this morning, I believe the prayer of the hypocrite is the prayer of that person who prays only in public. If the only time you pray and get serious about prayer is when you are called upon to pray, then I would need to say to you, dear brother, that you are bordering on hypocrisy. The public prayer must be backed up and supported by the private prayer. The person who does not pray in secret, and I am talking about physical secrecy, who knows nothing at all of keeping a time with God where he communes and communicates with God in a secret place of prayer, who only prays when he is called upon to pray in public, is praying hypocritically.

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Once you have learned to pray in **physical secrecy** it becomes easier to pray in **spiritual secrecy** in public. It is prayer that concentrates on the presence of God, but it is also prayer that is content with the praise of God. The hypocrite says, "I want the praise of men." They have their reward. "But thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee." In other words, I am content only with one thing, and that is the approval that God can give. That's all I want, and unless I have His approval, I have nothing else. I believe that if in our prayer life, whether it be public or private, if we keep these two things uppermost, I believe it will help us to pray sincerely and I believe it will help us pray effectively. Concentrating on the presence of God, content only with the praise of God. That's **all** that will please me. The flattering, the applause of men is nothing more than wood, hay, and stubble. The gold and silver and precious stones that I only will accept is knowing that my Father is pleased with what I have asked for and the attitude in which I have asked it.

Pray with Simplicity

Next, not only must we pray with sincerity and with secrecy, but we must also **pray in simplicity**. Now, Jesus comes to the "praying like the heathen" in verse seven. He says, "But when you pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye, therefore, like them, for you Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him." Don't pray like the heathen, who think they will be heard for their much speaking. Don't use vain repetitions.

Let me point out, that Jesus is not condemning repetition. He is condemning meaningless repetition. There is a big difference. There's nothing wrong with repetition in prayer. I believe that Jesus prayed repeatedly. I believe the parables in Luke 11 and Luke 18 teach us to pray with persistence and **stubborn** persistence. There is nothing wrong with repetition. When that repetition is caused by the burden of our hearts, when our hearts are so burdened with the need and we come to the Father like a child and we have no choice but to cry out repeatedly for that which our heart needs and our heart desires, I believe that is meaningful repetition. But simply to repeat in prayer, because we think God will hear us through our much speaking is meaningless repetition, "praying like the heathen." This word is almost impossible to translate into English. "Vain repetition," when He says, "they will be heard for their much speaking," it means babbling, rambling on. I think the New International translates it, "Babbling." Don't babble like the heathen. You see, they think that the Lord hears them because of how long and how loud they pray. Actually, what the heathen do is this: they think that they have to talk God into seeing things their way. They must convince God that they are worthy of receiving what they are asking for. In fact, they are trying to get God to believe in them and to convince God that they need what they are asking for. Again, there is some of the heathen in all of us. I think it would be a good exercise for us to analyze our praying. We might find that a great deal of our praying is trying to get God to believe in us. Trying to convince God that we need what we are asking for. Trying to get God to see things our way, wanting Him to cooperate with us. Analyze your own prayer life and see if that may not be true. "How long I pray impresses God. How loud I pray, how vigorously I pray, that impresses God." "No," Jesus said, "no, that is praying like the heathen."

Prayer is not a matter of trying to convince God you need things and it is not trying to get God to see things your way; it is not convincing God of your worthiness; it is not trying to get God to believe in you. Not that at all. The reason He says that we are not to pray this way, "For your Father knoweth what things you have need of before you ask."

You know the reason the heathen prayed the wrong way? They had the wrong concept of God. I believe that in the Christian life there is nothing more important than our having the right concept of God. You see, there is God as He is and there is God as we conceive Him to be. You do not worship God as He is, you worship God as you conceive Him to be. Your worship, your prayer life is determined by your concept of God.

You remember in John 4 where Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman, the conversation drifted around to religion and she had a few erroneous ideas about religion. She said, "I know that you Jews believe you are supposed to worship in a certain place in a certain way. Jesus corrected her but notice what He said. He said, "God is Spirit and they that

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worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth. Now notice the significance. Jesus said first of all, "Lady, you need to understand that God is Spirit. Your problem is you don't understand the nature of God. God is Spirit, therefore they that worship Him, must worship Him in conformity with His nature. If God is in spirit then your worship must also be in spirit."

The right concept of God means the right kind of worship. If we have the wrong concept of God, we will worship God in the wrong way. As a matter of fact, the Christian life is really nothing more than our responding to the nature and the character of God. That's what the Christian life is all about. "Be holy." Why? "Because I am holy." "We love." Why? "Because He first loved us." "Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." "If we are in Him, we ought to walk even as He walked." "God is light, therefore walk in the light as He is in the light and you will have fellowship one with another."

All the Christian life is simply a response to the character of God. My praying is nothing more than the responding to the nature and the character of God. Augustine said, "Help me to understand, O Lord, which is first; to praise Thee or to know Thee. Or to call upon Thee or to know Thee. For who can call upon Thee knowing Thee not. For he that knows Thee not may call upon Thee other than Thou art." I think what Augustine meant by that was simply this: if we don't understand the nature of God, we may ask God to do some things that are contrary to His nature.

I was discussing this idea, not this particular point, with someone a moment ago. We were talking about the perplexities that come in praying. For instance, we pray for someone to be healed and then that person dies. Yet, we really believe that God is going to heal that person. I have seen this happen a dozen times. Sometime it devastates a person's belief in prayer. You really believe, I mean with all your heart, that God is going to heal this person and they die. You know that is a mystery we cannot understand. But it is very difficult for us at times to discern the will of God when it comes to this matter of healing, because we superimpose our own feelings and we say, "If I were God, I would heal that person." It is hard to be objective. But I said to this person: one of our problems is that we don't value things the way God values them. We think the greatest thing that could happen would be for a person to be healed. For instance, let's suppose you were having a worship service and at the close of the service two people come forward. One man came in a wheelchair; he had been crippled from birth and as they wheeled him down to the front, God miraculously healed that man. He leaped up out of that wheelchair and ran out on legs strong. Over here, down this aisle comes a little nine-year-old boy trusting Christ as Savior. All right, we have two miracles. Let me ask you; which miracle will people go out talking about? Well, the man who was miraculously healed, that's the one that will make the newspapers. That's the one that we will use as illustrations. But you see that was physical miracle and this was a spiritual miracle. That miracle was temporary; this one is eternal. That miracle could have been accomplished simply by a word from the Lord; this miracle required the death of God's Son. God more highly values the one miracle and we value this miracle. One of our problems is we don't understand God, we just don't know God.

This is the trouble with prayer, Jesus says. The heathen don't understand. You don't need to try to convince God that you need things. God doesn't hear you because of how long and how loud you pray. Your heavenly Father always knows that you have need of these things. Some have supposed that that statement is almost a discouragement to pray. I had one fellow say to me, "I don't see then why we need to pray. If God knows I need it and He wants me to have it, then I will get it. I don't need to ask for it."

The only thing wrong with that is that it is wrong. Otherwise, Jesus would not have gone on in the next few verses telling us specifically for what things to pray. No, that is not a discouragement to pray; that's an **encouragement** to pray. What an encouragement it is to know that when I come into the presence of God, it is not up to me to try to convince God I need what I am asking for. He already knows of what I have need. I have seen this in my son. My son come into my study not long ago and he needed something. First of all, he began to pile up reason after reason why he needed it. Talk about vain repetition! On and on, telling me, "Now Dad, I really need this and this." It had to do something with

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his car. And this man said if we had this, and this.” Finally, I couldn’t take it anymore. I said, “Son, stop it, stop it. I know that you need it.” You should have seen the look of relief that passed over his face. There was such a relief. Why? Because suddenly he realized that the burden of proof wasn’t on him. It wasn’t up to him to try to convince old tight-fisted dad that he needed something. Dad already knew he needed it. Why, if dad knows he needs it, then dad will do whatever he can to provide it.

Jesus is saying when you come into the presence of God, you come into the presence of a Father **who already knows everything you have need of**. What an encouragement to pray, to come and say, “Father, you know I need this. You promised to meet all my needs according to your riches in glory by Christ Jesus, and so Father, here is my need, and I thank You that You already know I need it.

We have a Father that knows every need that we have. Therefore, there is no necessity of trying to convince God that we need it, or that we must pry blessings from the hand of God. Richard Trent said, “Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance. It is laying hold of God’s willingness.”

Pray Specifically

Well, how does one pray with simplicity? By praying specifically. Pray specifically, Jesus says, rather than praying like the heathen. This is the way to pray. Verse nine, “After this manner therefore pray ye. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy kingdom come, etc.” And then, He gives us what is commonly called the model prayer.

I am sure you are familiar with the fact that in this model prayer, you have six basic petitions. (Some say that there are seven, all depending on how you divide one of them. For the sake of symmetry, I will just say that there are six. In my humble and accurate opinion there are six petitions there!) The significant thing is that all of those are petitions. **All** of them are **petitions**. Even the one that says, “Hallowed be They name.” That is a petition. Jesus is not saying when you pray to hallow the name of God; He is not saying that. He is saying when you pray, pray for this. Father, let Thy name be honored, let Thy name be hallowed. All of these, every one of these are definite petitions. Now the reason I am laboring this point is this. That in the past few years, the great emphasis upon praise has been excellent. I think it has been an art long lost to the Christian church. I think one of the greatest rediscoveries the Christian church can ever make is the discovery of the art of praise and thanksgiving. But, as always with a new truth, when we discover a new truth, we invariably run it to the extreme.

I heard a Bible teacher in a conference some time ago make the statement that as we grow in maturity and as we grow in grace, there will be more praise and less petition. Then he made this statement. He said, “As a matter of fact if you are still in the petition stage of life, you are a carnal Christian.” I wanted to jump up and say something but I couldn’t or wouldn’t. What I wanted to say is, “Dear brother, if that’s true, then Jesus Christ Himself was a carnal Christian.” For an examination of His prayers will reveal that they were nearly one hundred percent petition, and often petition for Himself.

The recorded prayers of the New Testament are prayers of petition. Now, don’t misunderstand, I believe in praise, and that in our prayer times when we come together, there ought to be praise. I think sometimes in our praying we will not even ask God for anything, that we will just praise.

What I am saying to you is this, praise and petition are not an either / or circumstance. It is both / and. There is a growing emphasis today that we ought not to come to God in praise and in petition. **Prayer is basically petition**. You have a right to ask for things, and ask specifically for things. Don’t let anyone rob you of that birthright. This is the child’s prayer. He says, “Our Father.” Just as a child comes into the presence of his father, knowing that his father meets his needs and he asks specifically for those things of which he needs. Jesus says this is the way to pray. To me the simplest definition of prayer is the cry of a child to his father. That’s what prayer is. It is a child crying to his father. We are to pray specifically.

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Now in this prayer, of course, there are two divisions. First of all, we are to pray concerning the glory of the Father and to pray that the Father's name will be honored, that His rule will be established, and that His will be done. If we had time, we could emphasize the fact that this comes first; this always comes first. I do believe that in our praying, our uppermost thoughts should have to do with the glory of the Father.

Then comes praying for the good of the family. He tells us what we are to pray for. First of all, we are to pray for **provision**. He says, "Give us this day our daily bread." We are to pray for provision.

Secondly, we are to pray for **pardon**. Everything that you will ever need in your life is contained in that model prayer. It contains in principle everything. You could add nothing to it. Within those statements, within those petitions can be gathered every conceivable need that a man will ever experience. This is a blueprint. I believe that what Jesus is saying is this: that every prayer fashioned after this model will always be answered. Every prayer that meets the specifications of this blueprint will be answered, regardless of how long or how much we pray. We are simply fleshing out the bones of this prayer. This prayer is the model; it is the pattern; it is the blueprint upon which we build all of our praying.

I want to make just one observation in closing and that is with the opening words of this prayer when He says, "Our Father." In a very real sense that sums up the whole prayer, "Our Father." That is a requirement to pray, of course, we cannot honestly pray unless He is our Father, but more than that, that gives us the right to pray. Dr. J. D. Jones of England, great old preacher of another generation, tells a story about a Roman emperor who was coming home from a victorious campaign and, as always, the people would line the streets for that great show of pageantry. The Roman soldiers were there keeping the crowd back. Suddenly along the street comes this magnificent procession. The central figure in that, of course, was that Emperor, riding in that gold-plated carriage. Suddenly as that Emperor drew abreast, a little boy ran between the legs of the Roman soldier and started running out in the road towards the Emperor's carriage and the soldier ran out and grabbed him by the neck and said, "No, you can't go there. That's the Emperor." And the little boy broke loose from the soldier's grip and ran again towards the carriage and shouted back, "Your Emperor, but my father."

When I read that story, I thought to myself, how many times I have been intimidated to pray. What right do I have? I am a frail, sinful human being, come into the presence of a holy, righteous, infinite God. I tell you sometimes the Devil has been standing there at the door of praying and saying, "What right do you have? You are sinful, you are weak, you are frail. He is a holy and righteous God." I found myself wanting to say, "Devil, He's your God, but He's my Father." That's my right to pray, "Our Father." And I have a right, the same right to go into the presence of that Almighty God as my child has the right to come into my presence. Were I sitting up on the platform here this morning and my daughter came in, she would have every right to just come up and sit beside me. There would be no rebuke at all. I am her father; she's my child. She has that right. Jesus said, "When you pray, say, 'Our Father.'" That sets the tone for the rest of the prayer and gives us the basis of assurance that we have that the Father hears and that He answers. Let us pray together.

Our heavenly Father, we are thankful this morning that You have opened to us the doors of Your heart and have invited us to come in and to bask in the abundance of Your goodness. Thank You so much, Father. Forgive us of our prayerlessness, and pour out upon us a Spirit of prayer and supplication and teach us, Lord, how to pray. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Lord bless you.