

Matthew 6:9 "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven...

Pastor, why all this talk about “good works” – they can’t get us into heaven. We are saved by grace. Why do you keep talking about watching our language, honoring marriage and the gift of sex, generously giving to God’s Kingdom Work? “Good works” aren’t worth much to talk about, just keep on telling us what Jesus did for us.

I understand their point. Their point is that Jesus Christ and the good news of his work of salvation – his life, death and resurrection is all that is needed to create faith and convert sinners into sinner-saints. But let me ask you this. If that was all that was necessary or important, then why are you still here? Why didn’t the Lord take us to heaven as soon as we were baptized? The truth is that the ultimate purpose of our life as Christians on earth is the performance of good works. Allow me to remind you of some of value of performing good works:

- 1) Only thing on earth that lasts into eternity - NIV Revelation 14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."
- 2) By God’s promise, He rewards every single one of our good works - NIV Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.
- 3) The Lord commands me to teach you about good works so you can be productive on earth in the battle - Titus 3:8 This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone¹⁴ Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.
- 4) All Good works are God’s Work. Who are we to say they aren’t worth anything? - 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So the truth is that the Christian life is all about “good works”, not to earn God’s mercy but because of God’s mercy and God’s Will. So then what work is good in God’s eyes? What does God want us to do? Today I want to focus on one “good work” that God wants us to do everyday, all day long, in good times and bad – pray unceasingly.

How can prayer be a “good work”? Well, most importantly it is commanded by God. He commands us to pray unceasingly, and call upon me in the day of trouble. When we believe His promises about prayer and pray to God, we show ourselves to be His faithful believers! Only believers would talk to someone they cannot see when they will not hear anything back. It takes faith in Jesus promises to pray. God’s Will is that people trust in His promises – promises of mercy through His Son, promises of hearing the prayers of His people, promises of caring for His people and promises of answering the prayers of His people. When we pray to God we are following His command, trusting His promises in Jesus Christ and thereby showing him the proper fear and respect, which we call worship. Prayer is a way in which we worship our Savior.

Now we come to the content of our prayers. Pastor I don't know what to pray for or about. It seems that when I pray I always get off track and pray for things that I know nothing about at best or at its worst I am praying for things that are sinful.

Someone once said that Christian prayer is the heartbeat of the Christian or the pulse. The normal heartbeat of an average adult is 60-100 bpm. Athletes in training average 50 bpm or even lower 40 bpm. Going lower than that is not too wise because then it is a sure sign that something is wrong in your body and your body is not working at an efficient rate. Sadness, exhaustion, cold extremities, confusion, loss of appetite and physical strength and endurance are all symptoms of a low heart rate. One of the very first things an EMT on the scene does is start a Saline IV – you guessed it, to keep the heart pumped up and beating until they get to the ER.

Jesus tells us that Christian prayer is a heart to heart conversation between a child of God and their loving Heavenly Father. When the relationship is good, Father and child are talking regularly, freely and joyfully. When the relationship is bad, the conversations are sporadic, forced and uncomfortable, as the two have nothing in common to talk about. How is your prayer pulse? Is it regular, forced uncomfortable infrequent? Then I can tell you your relationship with your heavenly Father is struggling. So what do we do to keep our spiritual pulse healthy and pumping – How do we keep our prayers regular, joyful and spontaneous?

Jesus Christ is our friend and Savior. He understands the problems of a Child of God living in the enemy's territory. He taught us a simple way to pray to help stay on track with a healthy relationship to our Heavenly Father, to keep our focus on what we truly need the most and what we truly want as God's dearly loved children. The Lord's Prayer that he taught us helps us to keep the right priorities and pray for the right items in our life and for others.

Someone once asked me in Louisiana, why I pray the Lord's Prayer all the time. He said you know it's not magic. True enough its not some magical incantation like Abracadabra or Hocus Pocus. But you come up with a better one and I'll use that for God's people to talk with their Creator and Savior. What a tremendous blessing the Lord's Prayer is for us. We would be well served and foolish not to continually dig into its words every year, shoot every month. After all it is God's Will –it's what he wants us to pray about. Thank God he understands what we need.

The Lord's Prayer begins with the Address, like writing a letter, Our Father in Heaven. First and up at the front we are faced with a question – is God our heavenly Father and why? Our answer as believers is yes – He is my loving heavenly Father because he has called me by the gospel of Jesus Christ and adopted me into his family through the waters of baptism. As believers in Jesus Christ, we pray Our Father in heaven...

We don't have the time to talk specifically about all 6 of things we pray for in the Lord's Prayer so let's group them together. Many times I have heard people say, "Pastor you pray...I don't know what to pray for." The Lord's Prayer helps us out there and tells us what God wants. As Paul told Timothy, God wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. The Truth is what you and I believe as Christians. The truth is God's Word, the Bible. You and I know what God has told us. We know and believe that God loves us through Jesus Christ. When we hear or speak God's name it brings a smile to our face and a peace to our hearts that smile and heart filled peace is what God wants everyone to have – for all sinners. So Jesus teaches us to ask in the Lord's Prayer that God's name be set apart by all people that all people might become members of God's family (his kingdom) because that is what God wants

(His Will) Hallowed by your name, Your kingdom come, Your Will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

As we sit outside today enjoying the beauty of creation that God has made for us His people, our hearts are filled with gratitude. The gorgeous greens of the grass and trees and beautiful blues of the sky and waters of our lakes were made by the Lord for us. He didn't have to do all that for us. Yet in his mercy he gives us so much more than we need and especially more than we ever ask for. So in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus instructs us to ask for what we need on earth, not too much that we grow fat in our bodies and also fat and lazy in our souls and forget that everything is from God's hand. We ask that we would have enough and not too little that we might get frustrated and give up on our Heavenly Father. I remember a man in TX that I met. He told it had been 10 years since he had been back to church. You see he was a church going man, a faithful Christian from birth but the year after he was married his wife died of breast cancer. While she went through chemotherapy he prayed and prayed and prayed with her and his family that she would be healed and given back to him. When she died and the Lord said no, I gave up on God and walked away from religion faith and Jesus. He let me down.

That is a common problem we all face in our prayers. Some things are guaranteed to us as God's dearly loved adopted children. We have the guarantee that when we ask for these things we will receive them – first guarantee – grace, second guarantee - mercy, third guarantee - peace, fourth guarantee - forgiveness and the fifth and final guarantee - eternal life.

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

That's it for the guarantees, but that's all that we need. God's grace, mercy, peace, forgiveness and eternal life trump everything else in this temporary sin cursed world!

The problem comes in with our wants. The man wanted to be with his wife right now. You wanted to win that baseball game. I wanted to land that job. Every Christian must pray like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, that when I overstep my bounds and go beyond God's good and gracious, perfect and powerful Will, my prayer is voided. No one likes to have their plans their thoughts their wants voided. That is why only a Christian prayer is a good work to God. The Christian prayer is one that trusts in God's Will above even their own. Did you know that it is even reflected in our Church constitution? Any resolution of the congregation even if it be by unanimous vote is null and void if it conflicts with the very Word of God.

Thank goodness that prayer doesn't work like we want it to at times, that God is supposed to be forced into giving us what we want! Can you imagine what a horrible life you would have if you received what you wanted? I'd be playing shortstop for the Milwaukee Brewers, or a lawyer or a politician. And I'm sure your life's story is much the same. We don't know what is best for us and others so we pray your will be done.

That's all the time I have today for our look into the Lord's Prayer but this is not the end. Please use this time today as your start for praying your best to your Lord. Jump into the Lord's Prayer and think about one of the petitions this month. Pray your best to your Lord.