

Our initial exploration into prayer has generated interesting conversations, one of which reminded me of an old story, one you may have heard, about the father knocking on his son's bedroom door very early one morning, "David! Wake up!" Out of the darkened room, David's voice responds, "I don't want to get up, Papa." Papa bellows, "Get up David. You have to go to school." David replies, "But I don't want to go to school, Papa."

"Why not?" asks Papa, drawing back the curtains to let in the daylight.

"Because," says David, "school is boring. All the kids and teachers tease me, and I hate school."

"Well", says Papa, "I'll give you three reasons why you must go to school. First, because it is your duty; second, because you are forty-five years old, and third, because you're the Head! Now get up and go!"

Our approach to prayer is much the same. Like "young" David, we are fearful of prayer, even intimidated by it, perhaps because we don't know what will happen if we take prayer seriously, but we know something will happen, and our better sense says, *if you cannot control your life, you are a failure.*

We could be praying about a person or a situation for a long time and nothing **seems** to happen, so it becomes boring; our circle of family and friends might tease us because we pray and they don't (*So ..., does your food taste better now that you have prayed for it?, Are we enjoying the sunshine because you prayed for it*). More important is the realisation, God has given us a single, significant responsibility, which is to pray for all things. More often than not, we shirk this God-given responsibility, and we still blame Him, for not doing what **we** think, He should be doing.

Everyone wants to overcome their problems, but many are not prepared to do their part to make it happen. Anthony de Mello, the late Jesuit priest and well-known psychologist noted, "people don't really want to be cured. What they really want is relief; a cure is (life-changing and it is) too painful." A surgeon who attended several of de Mello's workshops and seminars, agrees. "Many

patients who come to me with a problem, would rather that I operate on their body, than they operate on their lifestyle and their attitudes. Only 25 percent of my patients accept responsibility for their wellness.”

There is an interesting narrative about a disabled man laying beside the pool of Bethesda<sup>1</sup> for 38 years, unable to get into the pool to be cured<sup>2</sup> because, every time he tried, someone would push him aside and go ahead of him. No one cared enough to help him, but Jesus saw him lying there<sup>3</sup>. Jesus did not ask him, “**Do you WISH to be made well?**” Jesus asked, “**Do you WANT to be made well?**”

Wishing to be made well does not make us well. We must want to be made well, to be driven to do all we **can** do, and are **able** do, to get well, and that’s when God steps in and does what God does, knowing what is best for us.

We are examining the framework for prayer Jesus taught us. Starting with two simple words, **Our Father**, Jesus opens the way for a new father-child relationship with God; He also invites us into this relationship which He enjoys. **Pray like this... Pray like I pray to My Father...**

Two weeks ago we started this series with the question, **Why Pray?** Last week we explored the question, **To whom do we pray?** and today we want to explore the question, **What do we pray for?**

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<sup>1</sup> The **Pool of Bethesda** is a [pool](#) of water in the [Muslim Quarter](#) of [Jerusalem](#), on the path of the Beth Zeta Valley. The fifth chapter of the [Gospel of John](#) describes such a pool in Jerusalem, near the Sheep Gate, which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. It is associated with [healing](#). Until the 19th century, there was no evidence outside of John’s Gospel for the existence of this pool; therefore, scholars argued that the gospel was written later, probably by someone without first-hand knowledge of the city of Jerusalem, and that the "pool" had only a metaphorical, rather than historical, significance. In the 19th century, archaeologists discovered the remains of a pool fitting the description in John’s Gospel. ([Wikipedia](#))

The name Bethesda means “house of mercy.” The water source was a nearby spring... according to the Bible there was a tradition that an angel moved the waters at certain times and healed the sick... Recent archaeological discoveries have again confirmed the Biblical account (<http://www.bible-history.com>)

<sup>2</sup> It is said that people who had faith in God’s healing power, experienced healing when the “waters were stirred”, but people who had faith in the curative property of water, rarely experienced healing.

<sup>3</sup> John 5:1-15

Jesus suggests, we pray for three things (*recite with the congregation, the model prayer Jesus taught us, Our Father ... pausing at give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our sins as we forgive others their sins against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver s from the evil one*):

**1. Sustenance      2. Forgiveness      3. Temptation.**

We shall explore these three requests in more detail next Sunday, but today, I want to leave you with an appreciation, why Jesus asked us to pray for these three things. Jesus did not ask to focus prayer on the poor, the corrupt leadership, human pride and hubris... but on sustenance, forgiveness and temptation.

One theme which runs through human history, is God's declaration and commitment, that He will **restore** this creation to its rightful place, He will make **ALL** things new. To the prophet Isaiah (mid-to-late 700s BC), God said, "Look, I create new heavens and a new earth. The former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind."<sup>4</sup>

The disciple John (100 AD, 800 years later!) describes one of the final visions he was given, "*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. The sea was also gone. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband... I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. He who was seated on the throne said, "Look! I am making all things new."*"<sup>5</sup>

These two passages 800 years apart, and many others throughout the Bible, convey the sense of God making **everything** new. Why does God need to do make everything new? Because, at creation, His arch enemy satan, deceived us into believing a lie, that we could become **like God**, and having believed the lie and acted on it, we spoilt God's perfect creation.

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<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 65:17

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 21:5

The temptation to disbelieve God, led to sin, the sin of disobedience. The consequence of this sin was, God's perfect world was no longer perfect: childbirth for the woman, and obtaining food for our daily sustenance by the man, were no longer pleasurable experiences. In pain a woman would give birth, and the food we need to sustain our bodies, was no longer hanging off the trees and sprouting abundantly off the ground, growing without any effort on our part; to feed ourselves, now required hard graft.

Jesus set in motion the final act towards making all things new. Through His resurrection, He defeated death, preparing the way for eternal life. Where there is no death; where there is no death there is only life, forever - eternal life!

John 3:16, is a famous verse in the Bible which is the most compact and to-the-point synopsis of God's plan and purpose, says, ***This is how God loved the world: He surrendered His one and only Son to death on the cross, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.*** The very next verse reads, ***God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world, through Him, might be saved.***<sup>6</sup>

Everything Jesus taught, was with a view to gathering ***anyone and everyone who believes He is sent by the Father***, assuring them, ***none will perish through eternal death, but will be saved and released to enjoy eternal life.***

The three things Jesus asks us to pray for, are the three most important things we struggle with living in this world: physical nourishment (food), our relationship with God and others around us, and staying away from being tempted into doing what is not right before God. All three require us to draw on God's strength, His wisdom and His protection.

First, at creation, we broke fellowship with God through disobedience, God said, ***The ground (not the earth) is cursed because of your action. From now on, all your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow thorns and thistles***

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<sup>6</sup> John 3:17

**for you, though you will eat of its grains. By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made.**

When we pray as Jesus taught us to pray, **Give us this day, our daily bread**, we are not ordering God for food, nor are we begging Him for food. We are pleading for mercy! **Please Father, do not let us struggle (as you decreed would happen) for our daily need of physical nourishment. In your mercy, and out of your love, give us today freely, the food we need to live, food for the day.**

The second thing Jesus asks us to pray for, is God's forgiveness, for us as the human race, and for us as individuals. There are many in human history who have led people astray, through **flawed ideology** (no ideology since the creation has withstood the test of time), **distorted theology** (our understanding of God) and **misleading sociology** (how we relate with others in society - relationships, attitudes etc). In all likelihood, all those who led people astray, did not recognise the error of their ways, and would not have sought God's forgiveness.

Jesus asks us to pray, God in His mercy, would forgive them their foolish ways.

Then there is us. We know we are not perfect. So very often, we are not aware of the things we do and words we use, which hurt others. As God forgives us when we hurt Him, so too must we forgive others who hurt us. Jesus' prayer on the cross, **Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do**, is not a condescending request, rather a practical way of appreciating God's free gift of forgiveness, by forgiving others. To forgive another person, is to free them from the burden of guilt and restore our relationship with them, and their relationship with God.

Finally, Jesus says we should pray, that we are not led into temptation, the way the first human beings were tempted to disobey God, to reject God's leadership, to dismiss Him as irrelevant, to the point of thinking, our knowledge and skills, make us **as God!**

As we pray to be protected, to be shielded, from temptation, to protect our relationship with God, Jesus says we should also name-and-shame the person whose only duties to attempt to lead us astray. **Deliver us from the evil one; deliver us from the satan who leads us astray.**

Do you remember the days of the VCR? You could run the tape backwards, and discover how a deed was done, discover how to **undo** things done.

Asking us to pray for sustenance, forgiveness and protection from temptation, Jesus teaches us to pray for undoing what was done, in the reverse order of how these took place: our downfall, degradation and disgrace in submitting to the temptation of becoming **like God**, led to sin which required forgiveness. Sin led to a broken, imperfect creation in which we have must toil and work hard to feed ourselves, as counter-faces (weeds and thorns) work to destroy our planting.

So, what do we pray for? Pray to be spared of struggling for our daily sustenance, pray to be forgiven as we forgive others, and pray to be spared from further temptation.

Why should we pray for these? We are praying for God's mercy as we wait on Him while He is making **all things new**.

**AMEN.**