

## THE GOSPEL IN PRINCIPLE 7

One of the interesting things about Celebrate Recovery is that there is no beatitude tied to Principle 7. Principle 7 is: “Reserve a daily time with God for self-examination, Bible reading and prayer, in order to know God and His will for my life, and to gain the power to follow His will.”

There is no Gospel statement here; no obvious good news of Jesus Christ. Instead, at first glance it's simply a requirement about what we are to do. Principle 7 is all about us, and so it's not as easy to see the Gospel in this principle as it is in the others – in every beatitude, there is a blessing: the kingdom of God is ours, we will be called sons of God, we will receive mercy, we shall inherit the earth, but there is no beatitude in this principle.

And when we talk about a daily time with God, I think many of us succumb to feeling worse about how miserable our quiet time actually is. I loved Dean's teaching on relapse. But when he said he gets up two hours before his wife and daughter for his quiet time, I was made to feel inferior, because my quiet time does not average two hours. So I'd like to avoid giving you advice tonight on what your quiet time should look like.

But it's a fact of recovery that time with your Savior is really important to your recovery and spiritual health. Dean said that it is actually a matter of life and death. No time spent with God leads to time spent in your addiction, which can kill you, or in the case of codependents, kill important relationships.

And it ought to make sense to the Christian that our Father in heaven actually wants to hear from us, spend time with us and communicate with us. I

think it's the gospel in this principle: **Our Father loves to hear from His children.**

This happens when we pray, spend time in His word and listen to His Spirit as we meditate.

So I thought we would talk about prayer, and some general guidelines to help in your prayer life. This is exactly what Jesus did, in the same sermon in which he laid out the beatitudes – we call it the Lord's Prayer. No matter what else you do in your quiet time, you can pray the Lord's Prayer – not by rote, without thinking, but as guide to effectively connecting with your Father in heaven.

I think the Lord's Prayer is a kind of jazz chart. The beauty of jazz is in the musician's ability to improvise. Every solo is different. And yet, if it's done well, every solo fits into a chord chart. There is freedom to improvise, but you have to play in the right key, change chords when the band changes, be aware of the beat, how many measures you've played, etc.

In the same way, it can take you 30 seconds to pray the Lord's Prayer or 30 minutes. Take all the time you want – improvise away – but follow the chart. That's what we will do tonight – look at the chart that is the Lord's Prayer, in an attempt to help you with the time you spend with God, as Principle 7 instructs us to do, for our recovery and because our Father wants to hear from us.

#### Our Father is God

It has been said that all prayer begins with worship. This should make sense to us. On Sunday mornings, we begin with worship – singing songs to God about God. We do the same thing here at CR. Yes we are here to work on our

recoveries, but it starts with worship, because we can do nothing without first acknowledging just who our higher is and what he is capable of.

So we pray, “Our Father, in heaven.” Do not blow by these words as you pray. Here is a chance to be grateful for your faith. First, we say, “our”; not “mine.” Even though we’re alone with God, we remember when we say “our” that we are part of a family of believers. “Our Father;” “My Father and my sponsor’s Father;” “My Father and my step study group’s Father.” We are brothers and sisters in Christ, part of one family. We are warriors serving the same King. We are members of one body. Remember that and be thankful for the people your Father has put into your life. You are not alone in this – don’t forget it when you pray.

“Our **Father**” – this is a hugely important word as we pray. It is the way Jesus addressed God when he prayed, so much different than Jewish custom, when the name of God (“Yahweh,” literally, “I Am that I Am”) was considered so holy that it could not be spoken. Instead, when praying, they would say, “The Name.” In seminary, when we would read Hebrew, when we came to the word pronounced “Yahweh,” we were instructed to say “Adonai,” as a sign of respect for the name.

But not Jesus – and because we are adopted sons and daughters of God because of Jesus, we can now call him “Abba, Father.” This is an intimate term available for us to use only because of the reconciling work of Jesus – a totally foreign concept to Jews. Some theologians say that “Abba Father” could really be translated, “Dad, or Daddy.” I’ve never felt comfortable calling Him that name, but get the picture – you have a spiritual dad. What a privilege!

So when you pray, and you say “Our Father,” remember what Paul says in Romans 8: <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

And remember where your Father is – He is in heaven. So when you pray, “Our Father in heaven,” you are reminding yourself that God is in control. He reigns from His throne in heaven. More Scripture (why the principle says to reserve a time for Bible reading, because it can encourage us):

<sup>15</sup> For thus says the One who is high and lifted up,  
 who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:  
 “I dwell in the high and holy place,  
 and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit,  
 to revive the spirit of the lowly,  
 and to revive the heart of the contrite.

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, our Lord,  
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
 You have set your glory above the heavens.

<sup>3</sup> When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
 the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

<sup>4</sup> what is man that you are mindful of him,

He is glorious in heaven, and He is mindful of you. He is sovereign over your pain; He is sovereign in the midst of disappointment. He is sovereign over your failure (Dean was so right to say that relapse is not part of recovery; it means you are not recovering, but never forget that no failure is too great for God to work with.). You must know this as you pray – that your Father in heaven, He is God, He is sovereign, and He is mindful of you.

We have only prayed the first line of the prayer. If your heart is encouraged even now, then understand how praying the way Jesus taught us can really connect with God the way the steps and principles instruct us.

Now, see that there are six petitions in the Lord's Prayer – I've listed them on your note sheet. We start by aligning ourselves with God (Hallowed be your name; Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven), and then we get to our needs (our daily bread, our need for forgiveness, and need to avoid temptation and be delivered from evil).

As you pray, be aware of your heart. Your prayers will reveal your heart's desires, and if you find yourself really desiring what Jesus instructs us to pray for.

**“Hallowed be your name.”** So, do you want God's name to be “hallowed”? Do we even know what it really means? It means that we want to see the name of God, and the name of Christ magnified – not to be somehow greater, but magnified as in multiplied. We want the name of Christ proclaimed, to the glory of God the Father, by more and more and more people. “Yes,’ we say, “ I want this.” OK – so you can share your strength, hope and experience as you work this program. May God's name be hallowed by the example of your life.

And as you pray this, remember that your prayer will be answered. Phil 29-11: “Therefore, God has highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

**Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

One of my favorite scenes from the Lord of the Rings trilogy is near the end of the first movie. Boromir, one of the Fellowship of the Ring, has betrayed the fellowship by trying to steal the ring from the appointed ring bearer, Frodo, for his own power and fame. But he recognizes the error of his ways, and at the end, he dies a heroic death fighting off Orcs to save Frodo and the ring.

As he lies dying, he says to Aragorn, the leader of the Fellowship, a Ranger whose kingship has yet to be fully revealed, "I would have followed you anywhere, my brother, my captain, my King." Why do I love this line? Because I have betrayed my Savior as well, but now it is my desire to follow Christ, who is my brother, my captain and my King.

We are members of God's family, and we have said that our Father loves to hear from His children. We are not home here on earth – we are assignment, given the assignment by our Father and King, and so we communicate with God to give Him news from the front. It is our assignment to fight evil – the evil in our own hearts, first of all, and the evil in those who God gives us to relate to. To be in recovery is to be battle tested. We follow our brother and captain and king because we want His will to be done, and we want to see the kingdom of heaven take place here on earth.

So you pray, but spend time on these words. "Your will be done" has to also mean, "Not my will be done." Your will and mine want no pain; our wills want simplicity; our wills want answers now. We will tell God what we need in a few minutes, but never forget that we have to desire His will be done above all else.

In fact, since we battle with our own wills so often, I suggest that this be the verse that goes with Principle 7. We all know we need one: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10)."

I pray this line so many times. I pray it when I pray for the Cacini family, because I understand so little. I pray it for parents when all hope seems to be lost for their wayward children. I pray it for couples when I have no idea of how God will work in their relationship. I pray it when the next case of abuse is reported on TV. "Lord, may your will be done, and may your kingdom come quickly. I have no choice but to trust you, Lord. Thank you for being trustworthy." Spend time on this line; make sure your will is submitted to God's, no matter what.

And the gospel says that God's purposes will be accomplished and his kingdom will come in all its fullness. We have the picture of the rider on the white horse in Revelation 19: "11 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."

You are in, right now, the armies of heaven (because the kingdom of heaven will one day be joined fully with the kingdom of earth that is now being

established), even if you are not quite fit for this final battle scene. Jesus wins, and he wins a battle when we pray toward that end, and work toward that end.

Now – now that we have aligned our wills with God’s; now that we have ordered our desires so that His name would be made great, His will would be done, and His kingdom would come – now we say, “But for me to function well as son in your army, I need a few things.” (Jesus says that our Father already knows anyway. He is just waiting for us to ask.)

**Give us this day our daily bread.** Bread here means much more than Panera. In fact, it could be that the bread I need today is the strength to say no to Panera bread. What do you need to survive today? You need strength; you need discipline; you need patience at work; you need a job; you need to stay sober; you need to stay strong with your boundaries. So you also need today someone to call; Scripture to encourage; the Spirit to show you the way to go. And you just need it today.

Did you know that when God provided manna for the people in the desert He always, for forty years, only provided what they needed for today? If the people tried to exert their own wills, and leave some on the ground for the next day, the next day it would be full of maggots and inedible. If they went out on the Sabbath, against God’s commands, they would find no manna. But if they trusted the Lord, what they collected the day before the Sabbath always lasted for two days.

Message – take what the Lord gives you, gratefully, and worry about tomorrow when it comes. Tell him what you need, but trust that He knows better, just as He knew exactly how much manna to leave, every day for forty years.



Give **us** our daily bread. This is the time to lift prayers for others as well. We are all members of one body, and there is a part of the body that is hurt, broken or infected, and we need the Great Healer to do His thing.

There is power in the prayer of a righteous person (James 5:16), and even more power in the prayers of even more righteous persons, and kingdom of heaven-type power when all believers are seeking God in prayer.

**Forgive us our debts, as we *have also* forgiven our debtors.**

Confession time – again, you are only confessing what God already knows, and yes, you have already been justified by the blood of Christ. But the process of recovery, and the process of sanctification involve the habit of confession. It is central to repentance.

Who do you need to forgive? Where are you at in the process?

Remember, this is step 11, and the list of amends was generated in step 8. N.T.

Wright says of this verse, “The heart that will not open to forgive will remain closed when God’s own forgiveness is offered.” In other words, perhaps the reason you struggle with guilt and shame is that you are carrying resentment instead of moving toward forgiveness. God has forgiven you – make this a reality as you do the work of forgiveness.

**Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.** This is the same petition, really – expressed negatively first then positively. What are the temptations and evil you face? “Lead me not to a bottle, or drug. Lead not by the liquor store or dealer.” Be specific. “Lead me not into anger.” “Lead me not into weakness with my husband or wife.”

How does God answer this prayer? He has given people for you to call. He has given you His word to study. He has given you a church to connect with. He has given you His Spirit to work in you. When you pray, then, remember that God is providing you a way out, and remember exactly what that way looks like. You'll be tempted – even Jesus was. But that's the battle that you're called to fight now. You are getting battle-tested to be ready for the armies of heaven when Christ comes again. God doesn't tempt you, but He will use your temptations to make you stronger, more valuable as one of His special warriors.

Now tradition has the Lord's Prayer ending, "For thine is the kingdom and the power and glory forever and ever." It's not really in the prayer that Jesus taught us, but I often pray it anyway, for this reason: A time is coming when there will be no more tears, or pain, or sorrow, or addiction, or temptation, or ugliness, or leprosy, or deformity, or anger, or bitterness, or resentment, or guilt or shame or evil. I know this because none of this exists even now in the kingdom of heaven, and heaven and earth will one day be the same. There will be perfect worship, perfect obedience, perfect joy, perfect food, perfect drink; there will simply be perfection. Christ's power is the power both now and forevermore. We will walk by sight and not by faith because we will finally be at home with the Lord.

Get in the habit of talking to God and hearing from Him every day. If this way of praying the Lord's Prayer has been helpful, I am glad. But no matter now you pray, remember the end game – to get your heart to a place each day where your desire is to be at home with Lord even as you taste his kingdom and power even now.