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West Suffolk Baptist Church West Suffolk Epistle



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Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

A Prayer for the Ages

It is hard to overstate the importance of the Lord's Prayer. Throughout church history, new converts and children have been disciplined chiefly in three areas: the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. For most of the last two millennia, it was assumed that if you were a Christian, you knew, memorized, and frequently prayed the Lord's prayer.

In one sense, John 17 is more precisely the Lord's Prayer. It is the longest recorded prayer in Scripture from the Lord Jesus. What we know as the Lord's Prayer is not the prayer Jesus prayed (at least not exactly—how could he say, "Forgive us our debts"?), but the prayer he taught his disciples to pray.

There are *two* versions of the Lord's Prayer, *one* in Luke and the more familiar *one* in Matthew. I don't think one prayer is dependent upon the other. A simpler explanation is that Jesus, like any itinerant preacher, taught on the same things over and over, with different words and in slightly different ways.

In Luke 11:1–2 Jesus's teaching is prompted by the disciples' request, "*Lord, teach us to pray*" (v. 1). They must have heard something in the way Jesus was praying that made them think, "*We have a lot to learn.*" Notice what Jesus did *not* talk about in response to their request. He didn't teach them how long their prayers should be, or at what time of day they should pray, or how many times each day they should pray, or what they should feel as they pray, or whether they should be standing or sitting or kneeling, or if they should close their eyes and fold their hands, or whether they should lift their hands and eyes to heaven.

It's not that concern about those things is wrong. But surely it's instructive that Jesus was most concerned with *what* they prayed, more than with when or where or for how long. This may be the most obvious and most important lesson to learn from Jesus about prayer. We can pray in the morning or in the evening, for a long time or a short time, with eyes open or eyes shut. There is freedom in a great many elements of prayer. But (1) we must not neglect praying, and (2) we must pray for the sort of things Jesus tells us to pray for.

The passage in Matthew 6:5–9 is part of Jesus's famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). You've probably realized that before. What you may not have noticed is that this section in the Sermon on the Mount covers the three foundational acts of Jewish piety: almsgiving ((6:1–4), prayer (6:5–15), and fasting ((6:16–18). These were the "spiritual disciplines" for first-century Jews (they would have memorized much of the Bible, but most couldn't read it daily because much of the population was illiterate, and individual families did not have Scripture scrolls in their homes). If they made New Year's resolutions back then, they would have thought of giving to the poor, praying, and fasting.



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Unlike Jesus's teaching in Luke, here in Matthew Jesus is concerned not just with the *what* of prayer but with the *how* of prayer. Specifically, Jesus wants to make sure we are praying for the right reasons from the right heart. In fact, that is his central concern in discussing all three acts of piety. When you give to the needy, don't make a big deal out of it. When you pray, don't do it to look good. And when you fast, don't draw attention to yourself. Jesus understands the pride and vanity that dwell in every human heart. Being religious doesn't mean you no longer seek vainglory. In fact, being religious is one of the chief ways in almost every culture that men and women find ways to nurture their pride and their vanity. What better way to look impressive before others than to be *spiritually* impressive?

So don't think for a moment, "Well, I'm a Christian, I go to church, and I'm spiritual and religious. I'm not in danger of these things." Actually those realities may mean we are in particular danger. ~ **Kevin DeYoung - Theologian, author, and pastor of University Reformed Church in East Lansing, MI. He is a member of The Gospel Coalition.**

Endurance

At the end of his ministry, the apostle Paul was in chains, languishing in a Roman prison and treated as a criminal (2 Timothy 1:16). Whereas in his first imprisonment he had a measure of comfort and freedom, he was now confined in a dank and perhaps crowded dungeon. It was from here that he wrote a letter to his son in the faith, Timothy, and urged him to persevere in strength and faithfulness (2 Timothy 2:1).

Paul understood that despite Timothy's sound doctrine and personal godliness, he was prone to waver. He had to warn him against timidity (2 Timothy 1:7). He had to urge him not to be ashamed of the testimony of Christ (v. 8). He had to enjoin him to retain sound doctrine and to guard the treasure of the gospel (vv. 13–14). He had to call him to diligence in handling God's word (2:15). He had to remind him to flee youthful lusts and pursue righteousness (v. 22). He had to exhort him to avoid foolish and ignorant speculations (v. 23).

Essentially, Paul was imploring Timothy to stay the path that he had previously been walking so faithfully. As spiritual stamina waned and opposition loomed, Timothy was in need of steadfastness. He needed to recall his past commitments—and stick with them.

This need was certainly not unique to Timothy. Spiritual endurance is a key component of godly masculinity. While any man can hold convictions for a time or have a moment of integrity—these qualities are only as good for as long as they persevere. It is inherent to godly strength that it endures under fire.

In a world that is hostile to the gospel of Christ, endurance is crucial. Without it, a barrage of error and sin will knock down even the most well-meaning believers. It is key for the leadership of families, the protection of the truth, the spread of the gospel, and growth in sanctification. If men give in to spiritual weariness, the results will be disastrous for the church.

Paul summed up his call to endurance in his second letter to Timothy: "*You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. . . . Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier*" (2 Timothy 2:1, 3–4).



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Writing from prison, Paul held up his own example to Timothy, reminding him that he was not calling the young man to tread a path that Paul himself had not trod. For many years Paul had suffered countless hardships (2 Corinthians 11:23–28) and now, as he wrote from prison, he was “*already being poured out as a drink offering*” (2 Timothy 4:6). Paul was calling his son in the faith to join him in suffering—to serve at his side, without deserting his post, even as the going got tough. The call was not to avoid suffering and affliction, but to endure it.

The Secrets to Endurance

This kind of endurance is a rare commodity among Christian men today. They start well, but the pressures of their role become difficult and tiresome—doctrinal and moral commitment slackens, devotion to family and church decreases, and the appeal of comfort and ease seduces them into idleness.

But God’s Word teaches us how to overcome such things and endure. In fact, in 2 Corinthians 4:16–18, Paul describes three key values that will produce endurance in the life of a believer. These will aid the Christian man as he fights to remain faithful.

First, a man will endure if he values spiritual strength over physical. Paul writes, “*Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day*” (2 Corinthians 4:16). Paul was able to endure anything that came at him in the physical realm because he was more concerned about what was happening in the spiritual realm.

Paul’s outer man—his physical body—was decaying because, like everyone, he was progressively aging. On top of that, his abnormally arduous life accelerated that process. Paul thought it would be better to wear out than to rust out, so he was old before his time—worn out in the cause of Christ. He never expected to have permanent youth or health. He knew that life was a process of decay.

And it wasn’t merely hunger, sleeplessness, and illness that took a toll on Paul; it was the battering his body received at the hands of his enemies. He bore the scars of beatings (Acts 16:22), whippings (2 Corinthians 11:24), and even a stoning (Acts 14:19; 2 Corinthians 11:25), as well as multiple imprisonments (Acts 16:24).

In spite of all this, Paul said that the inner man—his soul—was being renewed. In salvation, the inner man is regenerated—it is reborn and becomes a new creation (John 3:3–8; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Titus 3:5), and henceforth is constantly being renewed by sanctifying grace. Paul wrote that as his outer man suffered affliction, the state of his soul was improving. His mind, heart, and will were growing in holiness in direct correlation to the dying of his outer man.

The seeming paradox here is that when believers are physically weak and at the end of their own resources, they are in the place where they can be made spiritually strong: “*Therefore*,” Paul wrote, “*I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong*” (2 Corinthians 12:10).



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Life's trials, troubles, and difficulties serve only to build inner strength because they drive believers to humbly, prayerfully, and hopefully depend on God. That's why, at the end of his life, bereft of human comfort and support, Paul declared, *"The Lord stood with me and strengthened me"* (2 Timothy 4:17).

For all Christian men, the decaying outer man will perish, but in the process, the inner man will move from glory to glory by the sanctifying work of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18). You don't need to be able to bench press 400 pounds as much as you need to maintain holiness and champion the truth under persecution. This will only happen when we love what God accomplishes in the inner man through suffering more than we love our own lives (James 1:2–4).

Second, a man will endure if he values the future over the present. Second Corinthians 4:17 says, *"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."*

Though Paul's affliction was constant and intense, he viewed it as momentary in light of eternity. He knew that his life was *"just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away"* (James 4:14), after which *"man goes to his eternal home"* (Ecclesiastes 12:5). His life was but a blip.

Beyond that, Paul also believed the hardship he bore was light—even easy to bear. From an earthly perspective, it was severe and relentless. But for Paul, who was focused on his future in heaven, it was a weightless trifle.

Paul could think this way because he realized that the future held something far greater than all the pleasure the present could offer and all the pain it could throw at him. The present suffering was temporary; the future glory was eternal. The present suffering was light; the future glory was massive. The joys of heaven were beyond all measure, beyond all comparison to the present. So he wrote, *"We suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us"* (Romans 8:17–18).

Furthermore, suffering for Christ's sake in the present is actually producing this glory. There is a correspondence between the faithful endurance of suffering in this life and the believer's reward in heaven. Hence, a Christian looking forward to the joys stored up for him in the future can handle the troubles of this life.

There are many men who are seemingly content with the present—whether they are occupied with the pleasures of sin or more legitimate concerns like work and family. Regardless, if a man is tied to the things of the present, he will not have the will to endure in faithfulness to God.

Yet when he thinks about his future inheritance, and that endurance in times of trouble is producing an eternal weight of glory, he will press on toward the upward call (Philippians 3:14).



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Third, a man will endure if he values invisible realities over the visible. Returning to 2 Corinthians 4, Paul writes in verse 18, “*While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*”

Paul identifies the things which are seen as “temporal,” which means everything that belongs to time—everything that begins and ends with time. Everything in this category will perish. On the other hand, “*the things which are not seen*” refers to two entities here: the triune God and the souls of men.

Paul is instructing us to “look” at invisible realities, meaning we must think on and contemplate the eternal God, just as he did (e.g., Romans 11:33–36; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 Timothy 6:15–16). Paul was so consumed with God’s glory that he even preferred “*to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 5:8; cf. Philippians 1:23). His desire was to behold the Lord without hindrance (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Paul was also zealous for the souls of men, so much so that he wished he could be “*accursed, separated from Christ*” for the sake of saving others (Romans 9:1–4). His passion for people’s spiritual condition was the reason he was willing to “*endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory*” (2 Timothy 2:10). That passion eventually cost Paul his life.

All the possessions, ideas, systems, standards, ambitions, and achievements of this passing world didn’t matter a bit to Paul. If he never had a fortune, bank account, or house, if he never started an organization or had a respected career, if he never had prominence, fame, or earthly accomplishment—it didn’t matter to him.

To the world he was a colossal failure. I’m sure people talked about him, saying, “He might have amounted to something in life if he hadn’t turned to that strange religion.” After all, he was highly educated in Hellenistic and Jewish cultures; he was a Pharisee who knew the law inside out. But he gave up all these visible, temporal things for invisible, everlasting realities.

That kind of esteem for invisible realities will drive men to act like Paul—they will press on to know their God (Hosea 6:3; cf. Philippians 3:8). And they will sacrifice for the sake of man’s spiritual good.

Paul understood the secret of enduring, no matter how difficult or painful the trial. We ought to heed his inspired instruction. Men who, like Paul, cultivate spiritual strength in their inner person, do not let the present blind them to the future, and set their hearts on eternal realities will be able to exult with the apostle, “*We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed*” (2 Corinthians 4:8–9). ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**



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What is True Conversion?

Jesus said, “*Unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 18:3). Jesus is clear that if a person of this world is to be accepted into this other kingdom—the kingdom of heaven—he must be converted. Put very simply, to be converted is absolutely necessary to enter the kingdom of God.

What does the word conversion mean? In the biblical sense, conversion means a turning—a spiritual turning away from sin in repentance and to Christ in faith. It is a dramatic turning away from one path in order to pursue an entirely new one. It involves turning one’s back to the system of the world and its anti-God values. It involves a turning away from dead religion and self-righteousness. It involves a complete pivot, an about-face, in order to enter through the narrow gate that leads to life.

Conversion also involves the idea of changing direction. A true spiritual conversion radically alters the direction of one’s life. It is not a partial change wherein one is able to straddle the fence between two worlds. It is not a superficial turning, a mere rearranging of the outward facade of a person’s life. Conversion is not a gradual change that occurs over a period of time, like sanctification. Instead, a genuine conversion occurs much deeper within the soul of a person. It is a decisive break with old patterns of sin and the world and the embracing of new life in Christ by faith.

This spiritual conversion is so profound that it involves many changes in a person. It involves a change of mind, which is an intellectual change; and a change of view, a new recognition of God, self, sin, and Christ. It involves a change of affections, which is an emotional change, a change of feeling, a sorrow for sin committed against a holy and just God. It involves a change of will, which is a volitional change, an intentional turning away from sin and a turning to God through Christ to seek forgiveness. The entire person—mind, affections, and will—is radically, completely, and fully changed in conversion.

Theologically speaking, regeneration and conversion are two sides of the same coin. Regeneration is God’s sovereign activity by the Holy Spirit in the soul of one who is spiritually dead in sin. Regeneration is the implantation of new life in the soul. Regeneration gives the gifts of repentance and faith. On the other side of the coin, conversion is the response of the one who is regenerated. Esteemed British pastor D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said:

Conversion is the first exercise of the new nature in ceasing from old forms of life and starting a new life. It is the first action of the regenerate soul in moving from something to something.

Regeneration precedes and produces conversion. There is a cause-and-effect relationship between these two. Regeneration is the cause, and conversion is the effect. Put another way, regeneration is the root and conversion is the fruit.

To affirm true conversion implies that there is also false conversion. Put simply, there is such a thing as non-saving faith. Not everyone who says, “*Lord, Lord*” has entered the narrow gate (Matthew 7:21). People may know the truth and may have felt grief regarding their sin, but it is a selfish sorrow over what their sin has caused them to suffer, not how it has offended a holy God.



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What is True Conversion?

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The most stark example of a false conversion we have in Scripture is that of Judas Iscariot. In a counterfeit conversion, there is no death to self, no submission to the lordship of Christ, no taking up a cross, no obedience in following Christ, no fruit of repentance—only empty words, shallow feelings, and barren religious activities. On the contrary, with a true conversion sin is abhorred, the world renounced, pride crushed, self surrendered, faith exercised, Christ seen as precious, and the cross embraced as one’s only saving hope.

The whole purpose of conversion is to bring men and women into a right relationship with God. This is why Christ came, and it is the reason for which He died. It was God who was “*in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself*” (2 Corinthians 5:19). Conversion is the crying need of the soul. Until one’s life is turned from sin to Christ, nothing else matters. ~ *Dr. Steven J. Lawson - Founder and president of OnePassion Ministries in Dallas.*

How did Jesus Transform the Sixth Commandment?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus deepens and transforms this commandment, helping us to understand its true significance. The sixth commandment not only prohibits violent acts of murder but all violent emotions and intentions of the heart (Matthew 5:21–26). You and I can be 100 percent murder free but still face the wrath of God if our life is marked by anger, bitterness, invective, insult, and rage.

In David Powlison’s book *Good and Angry* he has a chapter entitled, “*Do You Have a Serious Problem with Anger?*” It’s very clever, because the chapter is only one word long: “Yes.” That’s all it says. And rightly so. You and I have an anger problem. And if we don’t get it under control, we may be in danger of hell.

And that’s not all Jesus says about anger. He gives two illustrations—one about going to the temple and one about going to court—and neither is about our anger. Jesus says that anger is so serious that we should not only do what we can to eliminate it in our heart, but also do what we can to prevent and alleviate it in others. The sixth commandment doesn’t just forbid physical murder or even simply prohibit murder of the heart. It positively enjoins us to seek reconciliation.

Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will say that we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Sociodemographic categories are all we hear in politics. Everyone is a category: white evangelicals, African Americans, Asian Americans, uneducated, working class, the 1 percent. Everyone gets a little category. Jesus says that if you love only the people who like you, dress like you, root for the things you do, and vote for the people you do—well, that’s no big deal. Everybody does that. What about your enemies? What about the people who mistreat you? What about the people who don’t understand you? By condemning envy, hatred, and anger, the *Heidelberg Catechism* says that God tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be patient, peace loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly to them.

Did you notice what Jesus said at the end of Matthew 5:26? He says that if you are this sort of angry fool, “*you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.*” If you insist on pouring out the cup of your wrath, there’s another cup for you to drink.



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How did Jesus Transform the Sixth Commandment?

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As he is apt to do, Jesus makes the one commandment we would have thought we were all going to feel pretty good about into one of the commandments we all feel pretty bad about. Which one of us hasn't been unrighteously angry this week? There is a way to be righteous in anger, but that's not the way that most of us are angry. We show it in the way we speak to our spouse, when we silently judge, when we explode at our children over the simplest things, and when somebody drives in front of us and goes too slow, and you would think that they had cursed your whole family for all time. Jesus says that you will not get out until you pay the last penny. That's how serious anger is.

So what do we do? We've all had this cup of wrath at some point in our lives—if not so that others can see it, then in our hearts. We were fuming, scheming, steaming mad, drinking our bubbling, exploding cup of wrath. So what do we do? We look to the Garden of Gethsemane and find Jesus there with another cup. As he is facing his death on the cross, he prays, *“My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will”* (Matthew 26:39). What's the cup? It's not the cup of our wrath but of God's wrath for sinners like us. It's his righteous, perfect anger directed toward people like us, who have so often displayed such unrighteous, unholy anger. And Jesus says, *“If this is the only way, Father. I'll take it.”* We deserve that cup, but he took it upon himself. The only one who never violated any of the commandments or committed murder in the least degree in his heart was murdered for angry murderers like us. We have all poured out the cup of wrath on one another, but only Jesus drank from that cup for us. ~ **Kevin DeYoung - Theologian, author, and pastor of University Reformed Church in East Lansing, MI. He is a member of The Gospel Coalition.**

Trials' Lessons - Contentment

We rely every day on material possessions—cars, computers, pagers, telephones, microwaves, radios, and TVs. These familiar conveniences make us feel as though it's quite a hardship to cope without them. Therefore it's difficult to avoid the pitfall Jesus warned about in Matthew 6:24, *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon [riches].”*

Materialism can exert such a powerful influence on us as believers that the Lord will sometimes subject us to trials just so He can remove us from the grip of the world's devices and riches. Various trials and sufferings will almost invariably reveal how inadequate our possessions are to meet our deepest needs or provide genuine relief from the pains and stresses of life. And this realization ought to become more and more true of you as you grow in the Christian life. I have observed that mature believers, as time goes by, become less and less attached to the temporal items they've accumulated. Such stuff, along with life's fleeting experiences, simply fades in importance as you draw closer to the Lord.

Moses is a wonderful example of someone who learned through trials these important lessons about materialism (Hebrew 11:24-26). He spent forty years in Pharaoh's household and was brought up to be an Egyptian prince. But he was willing to leave a position of prestige and power so he could experience something of the sufferings of his fellow Israelites, who were living as slaves in Egypt. God in effect made Moses a participant in Israel's trials, content to rely on Him, not on the comforts and advantages of materialism: *“By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen”* (Hebrews 11:27). The Lord might need to get our attention in similar fashion, so that we learn one of the key lessons from life's trials: to rely on His unlimited spiritual wealth, not on our finite and fading material possessions. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**



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If you have a birthday or anniversary in June that is not posted here or is listed in error or you do not want to be published in this newsletter, please contact Walt or e-mail him at gwlcf10415@gmail.com.

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner June 2024

Birthdays

Gene A. (6)
Mike P. (27)
Ruth E. (30)

Anniversaries

Zach and Corrisa A. (16)
Ben and Carrie P. (23)
Scott and Ruth T. (25)

By Grace Through Faith - Ephesians 2:1 - 10

2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. ~ ***ESV***



West Suffolk Baptist Church Leadership

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