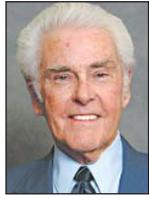


Transformed in my prayer

One of the middle school Sunday School teachers in our church has developed a program of teaching her pupils



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to memorize select sections of Scripture to help them in their daily walk with God. After several of the students have memorized their selected verses, she brings them into my senior adult department to share them with the department. The most popular sections for memorization are the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm. It is always a joy for these grandparents to have their own grandchildren or just other children repeat sections of the Bible for them.

On other occasions I go into their department to allow them to witness that memorization of strong guidelines can come from other sources that will remain with them for life. The most popular non-biblical sections are the Scout Oath and Scout Law: On my honor I will do my best to do duty for God and my country, I will obey the Scout Law and help other people at all times and keep myself physically strong, mentally alert, and morally straight. The elements of the Law are to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent. It is obvious that such commitments are also forms of prayer.

When the 23rd Psalm is compared with the Lord's Prayer, both of them begin with the acknowledgment of God's presence with the believer.

Prayer begins with a focus on

God and His kingdom (Matthew 6:9-10). The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray is found in two sources, Matthew 6 and Luke 11. The differences between the two have caused endless discussion among Jewish and Christian scholars. A.M. Hunter offers a wise approach to these differences: "It is wiser to admit that, as in the narratives of the Lord's Supper, no single fixed form has come down to us. The fact is that you can make out a case for either version" (A Pattern for Life, p. 65).

For most uses in the church, the Matthew version is the one most widely used. In the invocation, v.9, "Father" is Jesus' name for God. Only here does he say "our Father." From some references in the Old Testament, "we find men beginning to speak as the Father of the individual." Jesus gave this address "a centrality that transformed men's thoughts of God; and he did so because the Father was the supreme reality of his own life. The title means that God is not a cosmic principle, but a living Person: it connotes authority, goodness, love" (Hunter, pp. 67, 68).

When we pray, "Hallowed be thy name," we are committing ourselves to treat God as "holy, to honour, to revere." Along with this specific prayer, we are also seeking that God's will be done among us as we are living our daily lives.

Present all your needs to God (Matthew 6:11-13). Our daily bread is a part of God's will for us. Hunter has included a lovely poem honoring that gift of life from God:

Back of the loaf is the snowy flour,

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Scripture: Matthew 6:9-15

*And back of the flour is the mill,
And back of the mill is the sun and the shower
And the wheat, and the Father's will.*

Our bread for the tomorrow is symbolic of the continuing care that God has for those who trust him and place their lives in His care.

Forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15). One of the most demanding of the expectations of this prayer is the willingness to forgive others for their sins against us. During the last years of destructive action against Christians just because they are Christians, we have exposed to forgiveness by those who suffered in a manner that is almost impossible to believe. When nine worshippers were killed at a prayer meeting, the survivors prayed for God to forgive the perpetrators. Yet this is what Jesus was praying for among his people.

Across the world such forgiveness has been expressed because of the redeeming love of God. Raymond E. Herklots put these words of Jesus into hymnody to challenge our thoughts.

*"Forgive our sins as we forgive"
You taught us, Lord, to pray;
How can your pardon reach
and bless the unforgiving heart?
That broods on wrongs and will not let
old bitterness depart?
In blazing light your cross reveals
the truth we dimly knew;
What trivial debts are owed to us,
how great our debt to You!
Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls,
and bid resentment cease;
Then, bound to all in bonds of love,
our lives will spread your peace.*

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