

**INTRO:** This past Thursday Allison and I celebrated our 32<sup>nd</sup> anniversary.

We’ve had lots of good times together and have lots of inside jokes. When our first child was born, I think it’s fair to say that as a new mother, Allison was a tightly-wound.

One thing that particularly concerned her was baby nap time.

She didn’t want anything to wake up the baby.

I came home for lunch one day and Allison was standing at the window just glaring outside with a fierce look on her face. I asked her what was wrong.

We were living in an apartment at the time and the yard service crew had come to the apartment complex and they were using their gas-powered blowers, blowing leaves and grass off the sidewalks.

You know how loud those things are.

Well, it was baby nap time, and Allison was furious.

She turned to me and said: If I were queen, those guys would be dead.

I said: But your majesty, they’re just doing their job.

They have babies of their own they’re trying to feed.

She just said: They’d be dead.

I said: Wouldn’t you give them a warning?

She said: They should know better.

So that became one of our marriage jokes: If I were queen . . .

If we see a parking space and someone beats us to it, we say:

If I were queen . . .

If we have to deal with a clueless or unhelpful clerk, we say:

If I were queen . . .

If someone lets their dog jump on us or touch us with its wet nose, when they walk away, we turn to each other and say:

If I were queen . . . they and their dog!

It’s a joke, but, in a way it’s not. We are bothered when we don’t get our way.

And if all of us dug deep enough into our negative emotions—

whether anger or disappointment or worry or discontentment—

we would find that very often those negative emotions are our response to situations in which our wills have been crossed,

and we have not gotten what we want.

This petition of the Lord’s Prayer is radical.

Jesus gets down to the roots of our souls and teaches us to pray for something that truly goes against the grain—that God’s will be done. He’s teaching us that the purpose of prayer is not to bend God’s will to ours, but that our wills be softened and bent to his will.

Thomas Watson, an English Puritan, said this petition is a request for two things:  
That we will be able to do diligently all that God commands, and  
That we will be able to submit patiently to all he inflicts.  
That’s putting it bluntly, isn’t it?!  
To do diligently all he commands and submit patiently to all he inflicts.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church, put it more poetically:  
I am no longer my own, but Thine. Put me to what Thou wilt, rank me with whom Thou wilt; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for Thee or laid aside for Thee; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and heartily yield all things to Thy pleasure and disposal.

That’s much more beautifully stated, but it’s still radical, isn’t it?  
Rank me with whom Thou wilt. Put me to suffering.  
Let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
Can you pray that?  
And add—I freely and heartily yield all things to Thy pleasure and disposal?

That sounds like a nightmare prayer for most people. Because the natural impulse of the human heart is that the good life is the life I plan and control. The good life is working things out according to my pleasure and my will. Setting my sights on what I think will make me happy, and going for it. The good life is me being queen or king and captain of my destiny.

Jesus Christ says, No. If you ever want to be able to pray and get anywhere spiritually, and have a hope of really knowing God, must learn to pray this way.

So let’s look at this under three points:  
When to pray this way.  
Why to pray this way.  
How to pray this way.

## **MP#1 When to pray this way**

Let's consider first when you should pray: Thy will be done.

In the Lord's Prayer the petitions are in a particular order.

You pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Then you take a breath and pray: "Give us this day our daily bread."  
There is a faith lesson that the Lord Jesus is teaching with that order.

Your daily bread refers to the things you really need.

Not optional things, not things that would be nice to have—

but the important things on which your life and wellbeing depend—  
your physical and emotional and relational health and happiness.

Most of the time and in a many areas of your life, God gives you your daily bread.

In other words, God's will coincides with your will, with what you want and need.

That's because he's your Father and he loves you and enjoys giving to you.

Good fathers delight saying yes to their children.

But there are times in life when God has his reasons to hold back and not give you those things and that's really painful and disconcerting.

There are times when God seems to inflict things on you.

The circumstances in your life are beating you down, hemming you in,  
taking you places you don't want to go, threatening your daily bread.

You might be able to identify many secondary causes,  
but you know that this is ultimately the Lord's doing.

There are also times when the Lord commands you to do something that feels  
like it's threatening your happiness.

You know from the Bible and from your conscience that this is God's command.

And if circumstances in your life were different, it would be easy to obey.

But when it seems that your obedience to God's command will threaten your daily  
bread, then it's hard.

This is where the spiritual logic of the Lord's Prayer comes into play.

When God's providence and God's commands seem to be the very things that are  
threatening your happiness and well-being, you have to pray: Thy will be done.

The main character in Alan Paton's novel *Cry, The Beloved Country* is a black,  
South African pastor named Stephen Kumalo.

In the movie version, Stephen Kumalo is played by James Earl Jones.

So you can imagine a man with his voice and dignity.

The story is set in South Africa during apartheid.

Stephen Kumalo's son Absalom leaves the village where his father's church is located, and moves to Johannesburg. While he is there he forgets his Christian upbringing, and gets involved with a bad crowd.

During a burglary, he is surprised by the home-owner and kills him.

The home-owner Absalom kills is a white man, a white South African, who happens to be well-known for his work to end apartheid.

He is someone Stephen Kumalo knew of and admired greatly.

Absalom is caught, tried, and sentenced to be hanged.

So there are all of these griefs for Rev. Kumalo—his son's crime, his own questions about how he had failed as a father and a minister, his son's execution date.

I'm not doing the book justice—it's very moving. But I tell you that to set up one of the last scenes. Absalom is to be executed at sunrise.

The day before Rev. Kumalo says to his wife . . .

"I am going up into the mountain." And she said, "I understand you." For twice before he had done it, once when the small boy Absalom was sick unto death, and once when he had thought of giving up the ministry to run a store for a white man named Baxter, for more money than the church could ever pay. And there was a third time, but without her knowledge, for she was away, and he had been sorely tempted to commit adultery with one of the teachers in the village who was weak and lonely. "Would you come with me," he said, "for I do not like to leave you alone." She was touched and she said, "I cannot come, but you must certainly go." She made him a bottle of tea and she wrapped up a few heavy cakes of maize. He took his coat and his stick and walked up the path.

Four times in his life when he really needed to pray: Your will be done.

Times when particular commands of God were in conflict with what his emotions and desires were crying out for him to do. So he had to go up into the mountain, be alone with God and pray: Your will be done. Help me obey.

Times when God's providence was hard and he had to pray:

Your will be done. You do all things well. Give grace to submit to your hand.

I'm not saying that you will only pray, Your will be done, three or four times in your life, at the crisis points.

But what I am saying is that most of the time it will be relatively easy to pray this prayer. Then there are going to be times when it is hard.

When God's will crosses your will. When God says no.

It's in those times especially, when you must pray as Jesus taught his disciples. This comes into sharper focus when we ask the question why.

That's the next point. Why does Christ want us to pray this way?

## **MP#2 Why to pray this way**

Here's the reason:

Because the Lord Jesus wants you to understand and experience your sonship. Obedience to the will of God is a pathway to knowing him as your Father.

The Lord's Prayer is a whole. We can break up each part for study, but you can't forget how every part relates to the whole.

And how does Jesus introduce this prayer? How does he tell us to address God? "Our Father in heaven."

And even before he teaches us that, he gives two negative lessons.

Don't pray like hypocrites—don't pray for and seek the admiration of people. You have a Father in heaven.

Go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father.

And don't pray like the pagans—don't think God is like a computer program—Do or say the right things, and out come the goodies.

You have a Father in heaven. He knows exactly what you need before you ask him. Talk to your Father. You are his beloved son or daughter.

So Jesus is teaching us to pray, Father, your will be done on earth as in heaven. You aren't praying to a distant God—you're talking to your Father.

And as your Father, his job is to impose his will on yours, and sometimes you understand why he's doing it, but sometimes it doesn't make sense.

When you are a dad and your children are little, you often impose your will on them. That's your job. That's part of loving them.

You know what they need and they don't.

I remember once holding one of our children so a nurse could give her a shot. She was kicking her legs and screaming, No, daddy, no!

No amount of explaining on my part could have gotten her to calm down.

This shot is good for you. It's a momentary pain for long-term benefit.

That wouldn't have worked. It was my will against hers because I loved her.

I remember another time taking one of the children to a store to return a toy he had shoplifted. He's old enough to feel the humiliation of having to tell the manager that he was sorry for what he had done and he begged me:

Just spank me. Just spank me!

He couldn't understand that I was trying to shape his conscience.

When you are a child, if everything your father did to you made sense to you, that wouldn't make sense. He wouldn't be doing what a father does.

He wouldn't have your best interests in mind.

He wouldn't be pushing you beyond yourself. He wouldn't be loving you. And it's the same way with your heavenly Father.

Jesus wants you to pray this way, because he wants you to learn and to experience your sonship. The commands of God and the providence of God are not the will of a distant, impersonal being, who doesn't care about your happiness —it's the will of your Father.

And as you pray this way, and acknowledge God's will, you know you are a son. Lord, I don't understand why you are doing this.

It hurts me. It confuses me. But you're my Father.

Lord, I know you've made it very clear in your Word what you want me to do, but there is such a struggle in my emotions. But you're my Father.

This is not shrugging your shoulders and saying—that's life.

This is not doing the right thing just because.

This is when your heart is warmed by the love of God so that your will is bent and shaped to God's will. So that you say: What you have done is best.

When we were raising our children, I loved to say yes to them.

I loved it when they would ask me for something I knew they really wanted and I could say yes. Yes, you can have that. Yes, you can do that.

I loved the pleasure it gave them and loved hearing them say, Thank you, dad.

But what I loved more was when I had to say no to my children, and they were disappointed, and maybe there were some tears and anger.

But then later they would hug me and say, That's ok, dad, I understand.

Because that spoke volumes about their love and respect for me, and about the impression my fatherly love had made on their hearts.

Jesus Christ wants you to know your heavenly Father's perfect love.

One of the big ways you learn it is by praying:

Father, you know what I want, but help me to submit and obey what you want.

That brings us to the third point.

### **MP#3 How to pray this way**

How do you pray this way? How do you pray it, mean it, act on it when some of the strongest voices in you rise up and say: But I don't want what God wants!?! Only through Jesus Christ.

The Lord not only teaches us to pray this way, he practiced what he preached.

Do you remember when he prayed this way? In the Garden of Gethsemane. It was night, he was in great distress, and he prayed:

“Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me.”

Martin Luther called this the most astonishing words in the Bible.

Why? Because they seem out of character for Christ.

For three years he had made clear that the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. And especially through the last year of his ministry, this purpose had been the chief point of conversations with his disciples. And he had purposely gone to Jerusalem to die.

And that very night, as he celebrated the Passover with his disciples, just across the valley from Gethsemane, he had told his disciples again what would happen—his betrayal and execution and resurrection.

And so for him to suddenly ask if there was any way to avoid the pain is surprising.

There have been many people in history who have faced horrible deaths bravely.

Yet here we have Jesus Christ himself saying: “Let this cup pass from me.”

Why was he so afraid to die? You know the answer.

It wasn't the physical pain of the cross that Jesus feared.

It wasn't the nails and the thirst.

It was that he was about to be made sin for us.

And then on the cross in the darkness and thirst, he would bear the wrath of God for the sins of the world.

We have no idea what that meant for him as the perfect, sinless man to be made for us—the horror and pain of it. But it was so terrible he almost collapsed.

We could just close here and go right to the Table—but our interest is in the next sentence of Jesus' prayer. “Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

Here is Jesus Christ asking for one thing—asking to be spared the painful and shameful death of the cross, and then subjecting that request to the will of God.

What is most striking is that this is something so very important—it's a matter of personal desperation.

It's one thing to pray Your will be done if it's not something you're personally wrapped up with. “Lord, please help missionary so and so get the financial support he needs to go to Timbuktu, if it be your will.” That's easy.

But it is another thing completely to subject your will to God concerning

something you are desperate for him to give you. That is exactly what Christ did. There never was a more desperate prayer prayed from a more pure heart.

And yet even Jesus prayed: Your will be done. He's your great example.

Now, let me ask you a personal question:

Where are you struggling with the will of God?

Maybe in your relationships. That's one of the most difficult.

Wives, you know God's will is that you honor and respect your husbands as unto the Lord. And yet you can think of a dozen reasons why you don't respect him, and he doesn't deserve your respect—but that's not what the Lord says.

He doesn't say—When it seems right to you.

You need to look at Christ in the Garden, pray that you would do God's will.

Husbands, you know God's will is that you love your wife as Christ loves church.

And yet you might not find her lovely, and you don't want to love her.

You need to look at Christ sweating blood in the Garden,

submitting to the will of his Father, not only because he loved his Father.

But also because he loved his church. He loved you. Wanted you to have heaven and not hell. Let that soften you and pray that you will follow him.

Children, young people, you know God's will is for you to honor and obey parents in the Lord for this is right. How many times this week did you challenge them?

How many times did you think their parenting unreasonable.

You need to pray: Lord, I want to do your will.

Think about how Jesus did what his Father wanted him to do, even though it was the last thing in the world he wanted to do.

Are you struggling to pray for God's will and the strength to do it?

Maybe it's in the area of your money, or your plans, or some temptation.

Look at Jesus Christ in the Gethsemane. Aren't you glad he prayed that way?

If he hadn't you would be suffering that death and going to hell.

I'm not saying you won't have conflicted feelings.

There will probably be a part of you that wants to resist God's will.

But the deeper part of you, the true part, your Spirit of sonship, will trust your Father.

There's one thing a true Christian can't do, and that's go against the will of his or her heavenly Father.

You might do it for a time, but you won't be able to bear it for long.

Sooner or later will have to say: Father, this is miserable. I've got to trust you. Help me to do all that you command and submit patiently to all that you inflict.

Is this hard? Yes, it is. But it's not harder than fighting against your Father.

And it won't be forever. Because there is heaven.

On earth as it is in heaven. There will be a day when you wake up,  
and your mind and desires will be completely purified.

You will see things clearly for the first time.

Because your will and God's will be one.

That's heaven. That's where the souls of the righteous even now are at peace.

And that's the great resurrection world Christ is preparing even now.

While still here, this very brief life. Let's get ready for that eternal life.

Bend our wills to our Father who loves us

by following his Son who taught us and showed us how to pray—

Thy will be done.