

The Lord's Prayer: Thy Will Be Done

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Prayer of Illumination

Teach us your way, O Lord, and lead us on a level path.
Teach us, O Lord, to follow your decrees;
then we will keep them to the end.
Give us understanding,
and we will keep your law and obey it with all our hearts.
Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 6:10 (NRSV)

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

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – The Lord's Prayer: Thy Will Be Done

In the movie *Up in the Air* Ryan Bingham (played by George Clooney) has one purpose in life—he wants to be a “million miler.”

And he will do whatever it takes to rack up a million airline miles. He lived in airplanes. Airports would be his home. His quest isn't so much a destination—as a perpetual state of journeying to attain the coveted status of being a million miler.

For his career, Bingham is a motivational speaker. His goal is to help people do whatever they need to do to accomplish their own personal goals. He gives the same motivational talk around the country using the same gimmick—bringing a backpack with him on stage. As he discards objects from his rucksack, he instructs his audience to unpack everything that holds you down or holds you back from accomplishing what you really want to do—especially relationships. The shallowness of this becomes apparent to everyone around Ryan Bingham.

An assistant asks him the question, “So, what do you want?” Bingham is silent. “You don't even know what you want,” she spits back in disgust.

Bingham finally attains his sought after million miler status. The captain visits him and congratulates him on his loyalty to the airlines. He then asks Bingham where he's from. Bingham's hollow reply falls flat, "I'm from here."

What do we really want? Where do we want to go? Knowing what we want and wanting what really matters is the difference between going somewhere or just going. Having a will helps us carry on and carry through. If we don't know what we want, or if what we want is hollow—our lives will be aimless. We'll be nomads more than pilgrims: roaming, drifting, wandering, loitering through life. But the good news is that there's still room for us to sign up for a journey, a mission, an adventure that has a purpose, focus, and direction. We need not only a good "why" in our lives, but a good "who." Thy will be done.

God, sort out my priorities. Redirect my purpose. Right my path.

St. Augustine wrote long ago that our lives are like a chicken yard full of random tracks—chicken tracks in the mud—running rampant and roughshod, with no rhyme or reason—going this way and that, utterly confused—all over the place. Like chickens with our heads cut off, we put on masks, buy the latest product, rush to follow some new trend, jump into some new experience, clawing and grasping to get what we know we want—only to find ourselves lost, empty, and wiped out. After all our cock-a-doodle-dooing, we raise the white flag and pray: God, I surrender. You know—I don't know. You're the expert—I'm just a novice. I'm worn out and weighed down by me. Take the lead. Praying "Thy will be done," draws our lives into something so much bigger, so much better, so much weightier than our small selves and our pointless million-mile plans.

Seeing our lives through the filter of God's will helps us see the big picture, and gives our lives purpose. A divine design emerges when we step back from ourselves. Our lives take on pattern, coherence, and meaning. We have vision, direction, a deep knowing that we're being guided by an unseen hand. That there's more to this life than me.

We're redirected to God's purposes:

"all things work together for good," says Paul in Romans,
"for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

In heaven, God's name is revered.

In heaven, God's kingship is recognized.

In heaven, God's will is realized.

And so Jesus teaches us to pray

That on earth, God's name might also be revered.

That on earth, God's kingship might also be recognized.

That on earth, God's will might also be done.

Heaven is the standard for earth. What is true of heaven needs to become true of earth.

In the Old Testament, one name for the angels is “ministers that do God’s will” in heaven. May we, like the angels, be known as “ministers who do God’s will” on earth. We pray for God’s will to be carried out, but we also pray for patience—to wait upon God’s will rather than force our own will. Our will and God’s will aren’t one in the same.

Prayer keeps us in a holy holding pattern—so we don’t rashly do our own will. Prayer schools us in patience, trust, and waiting—for God’s perfect timing.

But when we pray, “Thy will be done,” we’re not choosing a passive existence. Rather, we’re actively clearing out space in our lives for God to draw us closer to him and for God to draw us into his activity in the world. For Jesus, doing God’s will is a big deal. “My food,” says Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.” The most important thing in the world we can do is to carry out God’s will in our lives.

In the book of Mark, we get a glimpse of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, while his disciples slept. Literally throwing himself to the ground he prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. Then Jesus said, “Abba Father, for you all things are possible, remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will.”

Along with Jesus, in the Garden of Gethsemane moments of our lives, we can and should pray courageously “Thy will be done” because the Scriptures teach us that God’s will is good, pleasing, and perfect. Yet it’s so dang easy to pray for and live for MY WILL to be done. It’s so natural for us human beings to live utterly self-centered lives. Consumed with our own little fiefdoms and empires, we obsess over things like:

How am I looking to others? Am I getting my own way? Am I being recognized?

Praying “Thy will be done” is a huge remedy and relief from this.

When we choose to follow Christ, we drop and leave behind the nets of our selfish tendencies to hallow our own name, to build our own kingdom, and to do our own will, not God’s will. Thine not mine. The Lord’s prayer trains us to live a God-centered life. We say, it’s either “Thy way or the highway!” But even in prayer we can confuse mine with thine, thinking we’ve done the will of heaven.

It was November 1095 and Pope Urban II got the crowds worked up into a frenzy against the Muslims in the Holy Land.

“Enter upon the road to the Holy Sepulchre; wrest that land from the wicked race, and subject it to yourselves.”

In unison the crowds roared, “It is the will of God! It is the will of God!” And thus the Crusades were born.

“How sad,” said Sophocles in his play *Antigone*, “when those who reason, reason wrong.”

But how joyful it is, when those who pray, pray according to God's will, and live their lives according to God's will. Thy will be done. It is a mercy to everyone.

How do we know God's will? Well, starting with the 10 Commandments isn't a bad place, but ultimately we look to a person: The Word, the Logos—God's voice and God's dream for the world. God's Word, God's Will, God's Way, became flesh in Jesus Christ—the Word made flesh. So to know God's will, we look to Christ and what he was about:

Healing, teaching, preaching, loving, serving, feeding, blessing, suffering, dying, and living. In the Spirit of God, Christ lives through us and works through us. He accomplishes God's will through us.

The kingdom of God summons us to submit our will, our heart, our lives entirely to God. Not a half-yes or a maybe—we've got to be all in. We say, "God you're the expert here. I trust your judgment. Do what you think is best. You know better than I do."

Desiring and believing God's will is being done in our lives protects us from bitterness and jadedness. Where in faith we can say, you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. We believe God is bending resentment and betrayal into a story of preservation and provision. We're trusting that God is working behind the scenes—creating forgiveness, healing, hope, and a new start. Thy will be done. Even if it hasn't happened yet—we pray for it to happen. God's plans and purpose will not be thwarted—they will triumph. Praying "Thy will be done" should always include our requests. Jesus says, "You have not because you ask not."

As God's children, we can and should make our requests to God. It's not wrong or selfish to do this. At the same time, along with Garth Brooks, we thank God for unanswered prayers. God knows better than us what is good for us. Thank God sometimes God says "no" or "maybe later" to our hair-brained prayers. However, Paul tells us in the book of Romans that God is helping us understand God's will. The Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And so we needn't utter that phrase, "Thy will be done," with clenched teeth. We don't say those words with bitter resentment, or defeated resignation. We pray "Thy will be done" in a trusting restfulness for we know God's will is good. God's desires for us are a reflection of God's goodness, God's love, and God's wisdom.

To pray for God's will to be done is to be faithful to our calling, to be true to why we exist, to do what we've been created and empowered to do—to honor and serve our king, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

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