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A PRAYER OF SURRENDER



What's the most entertaining selfie you've seen or taken?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

Approach prayer with humble submission to the will of God.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In the last few years, a new word has entered our vocabulary: *selfie*. The word refers to taking a picture of yourself with a cellphone, and the word fits our culture perfectly. We have become a “selfie” culture, catering to a self-centered life.

We can experience positive benefits when we’re self-reliant and independent, but that’s quite different from being self-centered and narcissistic. Parents know how strong-willed toddlers can be when demanding their own way—even when what they want may be the worst thing for them. Unfortunately, too many of us never grew out of that phase; like toddlers, our “selfie” culture demands life on its own terms and tends to forget God’s rule.

The “selfie life” is the enemy of spiritual growth. As believers who want to develop a prayer life, we have to surrender our will to find God’s will. We must reject the seeming appeal of a “selfie life,” and when we do, we gain so much more.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Matthew 6:10

¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus came representing a kingdom totally unlike the political powers so familiar to us. Every aspect of our politics is scrutinized hour by hour to determine the popularity of our leaders and the percentage of constituents who agree with specific policies. But God's kingdom doesn't operate by popularity polls. God isn't running for office. He is the King.

Naturally then, in His Model Prayer, Jesus calls us to focus on His kingdom and His will. In one sense, the kingdom of God and will of God sum up everything that relates to prayer. Consider two aspects of prayer:

1. Those who lack power offer their prayers to the One who has all power. It is an appeal to God who rules His kingdom.
2. Prayer is often a plea for God to make some kind of change. We want God to heal the sick. We want Him to save the lost. We want God to hold the guilty accountable. We certainly want Him to forgive our own sins. In other words, we are constantly praying for Him to change something.

When we pray for His kingdom to come and His will to be done, we are intentionally surrendering our desires and self-interests to the powerful kingdom of God and to His plans. It is impossible to pray deeply until we surrender to the lordship of Christ and the rule of God.

We struggle with letting go of our own will, don't we? When a friend of mine was a child, he went with his father to a store where he spotted brightly-colored bicycle handlebar streamers. He could easily imagine how cool he would look to the other kids in the neighborhood with those long, bright streamers flowing from the handlebars of his bike. The only obstacle was his father. When my friend tried to convince his dad how necessary those cool, new streamers were, his father was having none of it. The answer was a resounding *no*.

What obstacles can keep us from surrendering our will to God's will?

QUESTION #2

That's when things got ugly. My friend began to cry loudly and created an embarrassing scene in the local store where his family often shopped. The drive home wasn't pleasant. My friend sulked in silence; worried about what he might face when he got home. But when they arrived, his dad opened the trunk and pulled out a brand-new bike! My friend was stubbornly demanding handlebar streamers for an old bicycle when his father had already planned to give him a brand-new one.

We always benefit when we surrender our will to the will of our loving Father. His will surpasses ours in *every way*. God knows what we need, and He knows what is best.

James 4:6-10

⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Jesus taught us to pray with God's kingdom upmost in mind. Yet we cannot focus on God's kingdom when we're focused on our own "kingdoms." We must surrender to God as King—as Lord—and that calls for humility. When we humble ourselves under His lordship, we keep our prayers in alignment with the larger purposes of God.

Pride has no place in our prayers. In fact, pride is the polar opposite of prayer, because prayer is humble dependence on God. Pride is the enemy of the kind of prayer God wants from us. In fact, James warned us pride invites the opposition of God.

Living under Christ's lordship with a desire for His will begins and ends with humbling ourselves before Him. How do we do this?

What are the benefits of humbly surrendering to God?

QUESTION #3

GIVE IT UP

Draw a line from items in the left column that demonstrate our surrender to God to match His responses on the right hand column:

Humble yourself.

He draws near to you.

Submit to God and resist Satan.

God gives grace and exalts you.

Draw near to God.

Satan will flee.

Write a prayer of surrender as you give up specific areas of your life to the Lord.

"Above all else, we must learn how to bring our wills into submission and obedience to the will of God, on a practical, daily, hour-by-hour basis!"

—JERRY BRIDGES

- ▶ **Submit to God.** Humility begins with surrender. Surrender is not defeat, but acknowledging that God is God—and we are not. We gladly submit our lives to Christ who knows us better than we know ourselves and loves us deeply despite that knowledge!
- ▶ **Resist the devil.** We are to stop resisting God, and instead, resist Satan. Satan's quest is to convince us our ways and plans are better, but a life in Christ is always better.
- ▶ **Draw near to God.** When we "draw near to God," He draws near to us. Surrendering our lives to His kingdom and will, therefore, is actually a matter of relationship rather than mere religious duty.
- ▶ **Confess.** Turning to God means turning from sin. "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." James expounded on the call to live pure and forgiven before God in verse 9: "Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom." In other words, be serious about your sin. Culture treats sin lightly, but the believer is to live humbly before God with a repentant heart that weeps over sin.



James 4:13-17

¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" — ¹⁴ yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

As we pray for God's kingdom to come, we also are to pray for His will to be done. We focus on His will—His plans—not our own. I heard long ago, "If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans." Obviously, that doesn't mean God wants to crush our hopes and dreams, but His plans are always better for us. God knows the future. Unfortunately, we often forget that simple truth.

This reality affects our prayer life. When we pray, we need to keep a light grip on our plans for the future, because not a second of it is promised to us. Even so, James was not calling us to live in faithless uncertainty, but rather, to pray and plan with faithful humility.

Confident self-assurance is never the key to answered prayer. Our confidence needs to rest in God and His will. God will not refuse the prayer for His kingdom to override our self-interest. When we pray for His will to be accomplished, we can expect His blessing.

Just as we pray for God's kingdom to come, we are to pray for God's will to be done—nothing less and nothing else. We surrender our lives and our plans to Christ. This goes back to drawing near to God. If we feel far away from God's purpose, we must seek Him with all our heart. This does not mean we request that He support and endorse our goals; nor do we petition God for an overview of His plans. We discover His plans only after we have aligned with His heart.

How does an awareness of the brevity of life help us live surrendered lives?

QUESTION #4

How can we help each other surrender our plans to God's plans?

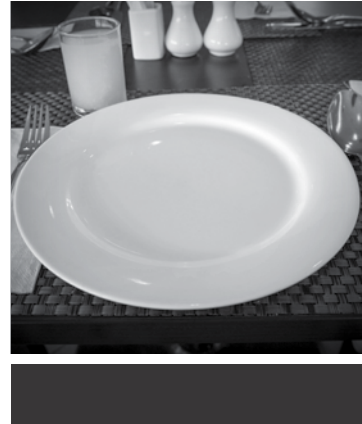
QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

How will the truths of this passage affect your prayer life? Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Evaluate.** Evaluate the things you pray for. Consider if you are more focused on what you want or what God wants.
- ▶ **Surrender.** Ask God to reveal areas of your life that you have not surrendered to Him.
- ▶ **Fast.** One day a week, add fasting to your prayer life to help you focus on God and break the power of “self.”

As believers we must surrender our will to find God’s will. Unlike the empty promise of a “selfie life,” putting God’s kingdom and His will first will lead us to spiritual maturity.



My thoughts