

## How Does a Steward Pray?

By R. Scott Rodin

As God's people we are called to be people of prayer. We are also called to live as godly stewards. And there is a powerful integration of these two callings, a rich interconnectedness that can ignite both a deeper prayer life and more passionate pursuit of godly stewardship.

Scripture gives us an illustration of how we should pray and a theology of what it means to be a steward. As we look at each we can see how they can so beautifully work together.

As recorded in Matthew 6, the pattern of the prayer Jesus taught us can be understood as a spiritual progression of eight parts. It begins with **praise** acknowledging God as our Father and Creator. It moves to an appeal for **God's kingdom to be manifest** on the earth and God's **will to be accomplished** in and through God's people. The prayer then asks God to **meet** our needs. This is followed by an **appeal for forgiveness** and a heart to **love and forgive our neighbor**. The prayer concludes with an **admission of our need** for God's strength in the face of temptation and our **deliverance from evil** which can only come from him.

Scripture also teaches us what it means to be a steward in the kingdom of God. We learn that our creation in the image of God means that we were originally created to live in harmonious, meaningful and joyful relations on four levels; namely, in our relationship to God, to ourselves, to our neighbor and to creation. We also learn that the Fall of humanity into sin destroyed our relationships on all four of these levels. Finally, rejoice in the knowledge that in Christ, all four of these relationships were redeemed and given back to us *as precious gifts*. Our call as stewards is lovingly to nurture these relationships, remembering the price that was paid to redeem them for us, and how they reflect our created purpose as image bearers of our triune God.

How then should a steward pray? If we apply the pattern of the Lord's Prayer to the four-fold nature of our calling to be stewards of God, we will see a beautiful and powerful prayer-life emerge. Here is what I think it might look like.

The prayer of the steward begins at the first level at the intersection of our praise to our triune God and the acknowledgement that our relationship to God has been bought for

us with the blood of Jesus Christ. To be a steward of this relationship should inspire praise, thanks and gratitude. And so we pray in praise to the God who created us, redeemed us and continues to draw near to us as his beloved children. From here our prayer will ask that God's will for us and all creation will become ever more present as we seek to be obedient to his call. We will continue by praying that God will provide all we need, equipping us that we might remain close to him. 'Our daily bread' in this way might mean our daily devotional time, prayer time and study of the Scriptures.

We will follow with a prayer of repentance of all we do that separates us from God and impedes the intimacy he wishes to have with each of us, and we pray for our neighbors who struggle with the same. We close by acknowledging that, left to ourselves, we will repeat the sin of Adam and go our own way. And so we fervently ask God to keep us close to him, to help us resist all attempts by the enemy to lure us away, and to deliver us each day from the trials and snares that lay in our path. The close of this prayer should leave us with a deeper sense of intimacy with God, equipping us to cleave to him daily and live out our calling to be stewards of our relationship at this first and most important level.

The prayer of the steward moves to the second level of our created reality and focuses us on our own self understanding. Following again the pattern of Jesus' prayer, we would begin by praising God for who we are and the way we are made. This simple prayer of praise will already begin to identify struggles we may have with our own self-perception. Whether we tend toward self-absorption or self-deprecation, the prayer of praise will immediately require us to see ourselves as God sees us. When we praise God for who we are and how we were created, we acknowledge his divine purpose for us. We are forced to take more seriously just how fearfully and wonderfully we have been made. And not just made, but redeemed and restored! From praise, our prayer will move to an appeal for God's will to become our will. That every day we may become more and more the person God created us to be. And as we do, God's kingdom will more fully come, and his will be done on earth in and through us. We will also pray for our needs to be met on this most personal level. Here we may need to pray for God to meet us in the midst of our greatest pain, where we question ourselves, carry the burden of guilt, struggle with pride or wrestle with despair. None of these reflect God's intent, and each needs this prayer of supplication if we are to be faithful stewards of our relationship to ourselves. This will be followed by a time of repentance for the ways we have let distorted worldly views of our self-worth displace the

divine view of our immense value to our Creator. Many of us need to seek repentance for allowing ourselves to measure our self-worth by worldly values. These distortions are as caustic to our souls as their counterpart of self-hatred. Both deny our created and redeemed reality as beloved children of the eternal and sovereign God of the universe. Finally, this prayer will lift up those places in our souls where we are most vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy who wishes that we think either more or less of ourselves than we ought. To 'lead us not into temptation' is to ask God to show us those places where we so easily acquiesce to the devil's schemes and slide into either self-exaltation or despair. We need his deliverance from these temptations that we might stay in the balance of a godly self-love and a godly humility. In this way, our prayer will guide and empower us to be stewards on this second level of our created existence.

On the third level, the prayer of the godly steward will begin with a prayer of praise to God for giving us our neighbors of every form and kind. We cannot be selective in our thanks to God for our neighbor or we will undermine the power of this prayer at the outset. We praise God for all people and we acknowledge in that prayer that God is wise and sovereign in the creation of each. This should cultivate in us a Christian worldview as we seek to live as salt and light amidst our neighbors. Our prayer will move to a focus on God's will and purpose for our neighbor, and our desire that his will be manifest in everyone. This, too, is a prayer that will keep us from either the sin of envy or of rejoicing in the suffering of others. If we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, then this prayer for God's good and perfect will for our neighbor lies at the heart of what it means to be a godly steward at this third level. Our prayer must also ask that God would meet not only the needs of our neighbor, but the needs we have in order to become a good neighbor. That is, we must pray against our lack of neighborliness and seek after those things that will better fit us for service to one another. How do we cultivate a servant's heart? How do we see our neighbor as God sees them? How do we get around our selfishness with regard to our time and truly be available to our neighbor in need? These are the petitions of godly stewards. Our prayer will then move to our need for forgiveness, and especially our need to be people of grace and peacemakers in our world. Finally, we end this petition with a prayer that God would open our eyes and show us where we are weakest and most vulnerable in our call to love our neighbor. We will seek God's transformation and ask for his deliverance from the evil that comes when we fail to love our neighbor as ourselves. This petition brings cleansing, insight

and empathy that must be a part of the godly steward at this third level of our created existence.

Finally, we come to the prayer of the steward for the creation itself. Here we can joyfully praise God for the wonder of his creation and his sustenance of it with each new sunrise. Our prayer will move to the petition that God's will be done in and through his creation. If we believe that God's perfect will and good purposes include his creation, then we will pray that God's will may truly be done 'in earth as it is in heaven'. We will also pray for the needs of creation. We will grieve over the ecological destruction we see everywhere. How desperately this world needs our prayers! In this prayer we will also acknowledge our own responsibility to be the conduit through which God meets the needs of his created world. To seek God's will for his creation is to seek our own place in meeting those needs. Similarly, our prayers for forgiveness will bring into focus those areas where our own lifestyles have contributed to the destruction of our earth. It will point us to the hoarding of wealth that results in abject poverty, and the over-consumption of our society that causes suffering to both humanity and nature. In this repentance we will seek to be shown where and how we must change in order to better carry out our calling as stewards on this fourth level. This prayer then will move to the naming of those areas that tempt us most, and where we so easily side with the world in the adoration of money and the destruction of God's creation. As we name our weaknesses here, we will pray for God's deliverance and his continued transformation of our lives into truly godly stewards at this fourth level of our created existence.

This is the prayer of the godly steward. If we will commit to pray through all four areas according to the pattern taught us by our Lord, we will find a refreshment, inspiration and reengagement with the challenges and joys of our vocation as stewards in the kingdom of the triune God of grace.