

I believe in God, the Father Almighty

UNIT
2

Prayer

Great and loving God, the one beyond time and space, we thank you for teaching us to know You through Your written and Living Word. You invite us to know and address You as “Father”—as “Daddy.” We thank You for the joy this brings to our lives, and for the peace it creates in our hearts. Empower us to look beyond the things that surround us to the wonders of the heavens above and to the miracle that each of us is. We praise You for providing us with our daily needs. Empower us to look beyond our own needs to the needs of all who live on Planet Earth—and to care and share in the spirit of Your Son, our forgiving Savior and Servant Lord. We give thanks that You have prepared an Eternal Home for us, and pray that You will keep us in faith so that might live with meaning, and eventually bid farewell to life in this world with peace, joy, and sure hope. In the name of Jesus, in Whom we have seen You and through Whom we belong to You. Amen.

ILLUSTRATION 2A

This illustration depicts biblical truths concerning the mystery of the Trinity, the works of the Trinity, the response that God seeks within the lives of His people. In his “hymn to the Trinity” in Ephesians 1:3–14, Paul’s does not unravel the mystery of the Trinity, but defines the work of each Person and summons readers to praise them.

ILLUSTRATION 2B

This reminds us that we do not own the planet on which we walk, nor the body in which we live. God does. It can serve a useful purpose in stewardship campaigns, in that it reminds us that there is no such thing as “Christian *giving*.” We merely *manage* that which God entrusts to our care and use.

ILLUSTRATION 2C

Here we are reminded that God merely places into our weak, beggarly hands (*bottom center*) the things that He permits us to use during this earthly pilgrimage. We in turn are to thank and praise God (*bottom left*) and serve and obey Him (*lower right*). Have participants interpret the meaning and significance of each symbol within the circle of God’s created order.

ILLUSTRATION 2D

This illustration clarifies issues relating to the responsible management of the things God entrusts to our use. The illustration rejects “tithing” as the final truth in relation to “giving.” There is such thing as “Christian giving.” Furthermore, if a person earns \$100,000 per year and “gives” 10%, that person has \$90,000 remaining—while a person who earns \$20,000 per year and give 10% has \$18,000 remaining. It might be asked, “Do people with \$90,000 remaining in their possession really need that amount?”

2E: An Apostles’ Creed for the New Millenium

Points 1–9 deal with the statements in the suggested *An Apostles’ Creed for the New Millennium*. The words in bold or bold italic type point to the focus of each section. Leaders should encourage students to read the creedal statements listed (both traditional and suggested), analyze the explanations offered in the text, and discuss how to apply the explanations to their personal life and the life of the church.

Applying the Truth

- 1 When people are asked, “How much do you pay for a loaf of bread?” (or bowl of rice, or whatever the staple food might be), various answers are offered. The biblical answer is, “Nothing.” Why?
- No one on Planet Earth has ever made a grain of wheat. Only God can do that.
 - A farmer takes a grain of wheat that God has made, and places it into the ground that God has made and owns. God’s sun and God’s rain cause the grain to germinate and multiply.
 - When we hand over money for a loaf of bread, we pay the farmer for planting and reaping, the trucker for transporting, the miller for grinding, the baker for baking, the storekeeper for placing it on a shelf. We do not pay for the bread itself. God gives us that.
 - Furthermore, when we hand over money we are merely handing over stored servanthood, stored effort, in a transferable, exchangeable form. The amount we hand over transfers our servanthood to the farmer, trucker, miller, baker, and storekeeper for the servanthood they put into producing the item we “purchased.”
- Consider then, how much did you pay for your house, furniture, car, clothes, farm, machinery, etc.?

To work through a–d is to be reminded that we pay nothing for anything. Everything belongs to God. We merely return money (stored servanthood and effort in a transferrable, exchangeable form) to those who produce the articles we “purchase” (“obtain access to”). The final statement in this section reminds us that none of us ever paid a cent for anything we like to call “ours.”

This is a profound truth—but one that is difficult to get across to people!

- 2 In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.”
- Does “bread” really come to me as a gift of God, or as a result of my effort? What is the relationship between the two?

In the final analysis, daily bread is the end result of God’s provision. The issue is dealt with in question 1 in this section.

- Do I thank God for daily bread every time I receive it?

We often begin and finish eating without thanking God.

- If I never again thank God for daily bread, will I receive it?

God continues to provide the needs of people who fail to thank Him for what He provides.

- If I will receive it, whether I thank God or not, why bother to thank Him?

We thank God so as to acknowledge that He is the provider, and to express our gratitude.

- Why does Jesus want me to pray “us” and “our”? Won’t it do if I pray “me” and “my”?

We ask God to empower us to meet the needs of a global humanity, as well as our own. Although a popular mealtime prayer is “Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest, and let this food to us be blessed,” it has some flaws. Jesus does not have to come to the meal

table; we do. Jesus is not *our* guest; we are *His* guests. A more appropriate mealtime prayer is:

*Lord, we thank You for
the food before us,
the friends beside us,
the love between us, and
Your presence among us. Amen.*

- 3 On occasion, some say:

We are a very fortunate people. God has given us a wonderful land in which to live. We are so blessed!

How would you respond to comments like these?

God has given us nothing—not even the land on which we walk and think of as “ours.” We merely use that which belongs to God. The New Testament never links the word “blessed” to having things to enjoy. It links the word to reflecting Jesus’ mind and manner, Matthew 5:1–12, Luke 6:20–26. We are here to develop and reflect more of Jesus’ character—not to accumulate and enjoy more of this world’s goods.

- 4 Some ask, “If God provides all things, why are so many around the world in need?” How do you respond to that statement?

There is nothing wrong with God’s *providing*, but there is a lot wrong with human *dividing*. Although some see the challenge of providing humanity with even the most basic needs as one that cannot be met, the information on pp. 11,12 reminds us that the real challenge is how to deal with the problem of human indulgence—and the advertising world that encourages it.

Follow-up

- Suggest that class participants, and members of the congregation, begin keeping a strict record of all that they spend week by week at restaurants. Then encourage them to give a matching amount to a needy cause—whether in their home country or beyond.
- Make the mealtime prayer suggested in 2e above available to all households in your church.
- Encourage people to fasten a map of the world to a wall near the family meal-table, and make every effort to learn the location of overseas countries and something about living conditions within their borders.