

The Context of the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:5-8)

- The reward for pretentious prayer is the same as the intent. Compare “they have received their reward in full” with “to be seen by others” (NIV). We should not downplay this kind of pretention Jesus is getting at. Drawing attention to our self in prayer (or in any religious activity) is to take attention away from God, which is tantamount to idolatry. It is a form of identity theft!
- The posture in prayer or the place of prayer is not crucial; it is the motive in prayer that Jesus addresses (“to be seen by others”). People prayed prostrate (Num 16:22; Matt 26:39); kneeling (Dan 6:10; Lk 22:41; Acts 9:40; 21:5); sitting (2 Sam 7:18; 1 Kgs 19:4); standing (1 Sam 1:26; Mk 11:25; Lk 18:11).
- Jesus does not forbid all public prayer, but stresses the private side of devotion to God in prayer. When right motives are in place, public prayer is appropriate. Nevertheless those who pray in public must always check their hearts before doing so.

The Lord's Prayer, Matt. 6:9-13*

- **The Paternity of God:** He is “*our Father in heaven*”
Addressing God as “Father” indicates intimacy in relationship. Acknowledging that God is “in heaven” underscores not only his greatness but also his other-ness. God is both near to us as Father and far from us as distinct. This is not a relationship among equals. He is “our Father;” we are his children (Ex 4:22-23; Hos 11:1).
- **The Priority of God:** “*hallowed be your name*”
By seeking to make God's name holy we prioritize his moral purity and perfections over our needs and wants. When we pray, it is God's honor that should be paramount in our thoughts.
- **The Program of God:** “*your kingdom come*”
It is the rule and reign of God in the hearts of his people. This is more a request for God to bring about His kingdom *in* us than it is for God to change circumstances *around* us. The progress of the kingdom will be brought about *by God for us* and *not by us for God*.
- **The Plan of God:** “*your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*”
If we're not willing to live like this, then should we pray like this? The benefits of seeking God's will above our own can reach into eternity (cf., Lk 22:42). This, I believe, is the hardest prayer we could pray but also the most important. It is a prayer for continuity between heaven and earth, which suggests they may not be two separate realms of existence, but rather a convergence of the two into one.
- **The Provision of God:** “*give us today our daily bread*”
Note: The progression in prayer begins with God's majesty (Mt 6:9-10), and then moves to our personal needs (Mt 6:11-13). Is this sequence important? Long-term provision is not in scope here; it is our day-to-day dependence upon Him that is in focus. Is this limited to food that nourishes our bodies (note how Jesus uses “bread” in Matt 4:4)?

* This alliterated outline comes from John MacArthur's study notes. However, the comments that follow are my own.

The Lord's Prayer

Week 3

This petition is also a kind of admission that everything we have comes from God (see especially Deut 8:11-18).

- **The Pardon of God:** *"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors"*
Note: Sin is seen as moral indebtedness (see Col 2:13-14). And note that it is our "debtors" not their debts that we forgive. We have no right to expect forgiveness from above when we're unwilling to grant it to others. In some sense, mending horizontal relationships takes precedence over our vertical relationship with God (cf., Matt 5:23-24). God takes our relationships with one another *very* seriously.
- **The Protection of God:** *"lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*
The prayer of a genuine worshipper knows his/her own weaknesses and acknowledges their utter dependence upon God to avoid temptation unto sin. Although God tempts no one to sin (Jm 1:13-15), this request is to rescue us from evil, which is the goal of temptation (cf., 1 Cor 10:13). Note this is a prayer to avoid sin, not necessarily temptation ("deliver us from evil"). Behind every attempt to lead us into evil is the "evil one," who, like a lion, is "looking for someone to devour" (1 Pt 5:8). Therefore, we pray for God's protection and deliverance.

A Few Words about Forgiveness and Prayer (Matt 6:14-15)

- Why do you suppose Jesus picked up on forgiveness when explaining the prayer to His disciples?
- Does Jesus say there are any conditions for God to grant forgiveness (see also, Lk 17:3; 1 Jn 1:9)?
- According to Is 59:2; Ps 66:18; Jn 9:31 are there any conditions for God to hear your prayers?
- Why is the willingness to extend the offer of forgiveness to others, whether they ask for it or not, an essential ingredient for an effective prayer life (see Matt 5:23-24)?

Next week: Prayer for Maturity (Ephesians 1:15-19)