

# *The Lord's Prayer (and Ours)*

The most well-known prayer of all, the Lord's Prayer (from Matthew 6:9-13), has been such an inspiration to me over the years. As I pray through it each day, I've written down some reflections and decided to compile them here. Nothing technical or complicated. Just a few thoughts and musings. I hope (and pray) you find them helpful.

## **First, some background to the Lord's Prayer.**

Leading into "Our Father" Matthew records Jesus's warnings on prayer, which are equally important (Matthew 6:5-8). Why is this so? Seems to me that any shamming or self-deception in prayer must first be identified and cast out if we are to lay bare our souls before God and manifest full sincerity. Observations on Jesus's warnings include:

- 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 pretension 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 (Numbers 16:22; Matthew 26:39); kneeling (Daniel 6:10; Luke 22:41; Acts 9:40; 21:5); sitting (2 Samuel 7:18; 1 Kings 19:4); standing (1 Samuel 1:26; Mark 11:25; Luke 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. *Before. Always.*

## **And now, the Prayer proper.**

**I**t begins "**Our Father in heaven.**" What can be observed here? First, addressing God as "Father" indicates intimacy in relationship. Our Father's love for us and his image in us go hand-in-hand. We are God's children, not in name only, but in reality (1 John 3:1)!

Second, the fact that God is "our Father" necessarily means we are his children. This is not a relationship among equals. Keeping this in mind properly aligns the relationship and enables the remaining elements to unfold in the Prayer.

Finally, that God is "in heaven" underscores not only his greatness but also his otherness. God is both near to us as Father but also far from us as Creator. Quite simply, children are not the same as their Father. God's essential being transcends us (Isaiah 66:1-2; Acts 7:48). Still, our Father is not a static sovereign, but a relationally loving, feeling being who answers prayer. He is "our Father in heaven."

**N**ext, we move on to the priority of God: "**hallowed be your name.**" What's the first thing you pray for? Is it what you want or something else? Here, Jesus teaches us what must come first from our lips when praying. To "hallow" someone is to revere or honor them. When we are eager to make God's name holy, we effectively are asking that the value of his moral excellencies relative to all else is preeminent in our lives. This is what it means to glorify God. Since all humans are made after the image of God, we are designed to reflect his glory. When we sin, we fall short of God's glory (moral excellencies)

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and fail to honor his name (Romans 3:23). When we ask that God's honor and glory be reflected in us, we are yielding our glory, our desires, our expectations to his. When we do so, we are being what we were made to be— God's image bearers.

Because he is "our Father in heaven," the first request we bring to him in every prayer is that his name be honored above all else, no matter what we want or desire. This is precisely what is exemplified in Jesus's prayer of agony before his crucifixion, "yet not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). To honor and revere God's name is to want what God wants and reflect what God is. Such privilege!

**J**ust as the priority in our prayers should be that our Father's name be hallowed, so also, we long to see his plan unfold as we pray "**your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**"

Quite simply, the kingdom of God is not so much "out there" as it is "in here." It is the rule and reign of God in our hearts. Too often we turn this inside out and expect that advancing God's kingdom here on earth is dependent on us as active contenders. We fail to recognize that we are first and foremost passive participants, yielding to God's Spirit as he shapes us by circumstances, not always fighting to change them. The advance of the kingdom is not brought about by us for God; it is brought about by God for us.

God's will right here, right now, in this life is paramount. As I said previously, we must want what God wants. If we're not willing to live like this, then should we pray like this? "Your kingdom come, your will be done," I believe, is the hardest prayer we could pray, but also the most important.

In addition, "your kingdom come, your will be done" is a prayer for continuity, not only between our hearts and God's, but between heaven and earth. Seeking God's will above our own spans all of reality "on earth as it is in heaven." Four insights that are crucial but often missed:

1. God's kingdom begins in the heart before it can manifest in the world.
2. We don't always want what God wants and therefore we must pray for it.
3. God's will is not always done here on earth as it is in heaven and therefore we must pray for it.
4. Heaven and earth are not two separate realms of existence, but two distinct aspects of one interconnected existence. Indeed, the culmination of all things entails this convergence as one integrated "new heaven and new earth" (Revelation 21:1). For now, there remains a thin, invisible veil separating our vision of the two, but heaven on earth IS real and someday the veil will be removed. Maranatha!

**T**he progression of the Lord's Prayer should not go unnoticed and is a model for our prayers. Already I've noted that Jesus begins by 1) embracing the paternity of God as "our Father in heaven," 2) the priority of God, "hallowed be your name," and 3) the plan of God, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Only then does he turn to the provision of God saying, "**give us this day our daily bread.**"

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Long-term provision is not in scope here; it is our day-to-day dependence on God that is in focus. In an age of plenty where resources and food-chain supplies seem endless, day-by-day dependence upon God is hardly on anyone's radar. Then, a pandemic occurs and this changes everything. Hoarders stock up to ensure that *they* are the ones meeting *their* needs even above others. Stores limit the number of customers, shelves once stocked full are now empty, and our daily needs are seriously in question. What I find enlightening about all this is that ***our daily needs never changed!*** Whether we live in plenty or in want, whether rich or poor, our daily needs are the same. It is *this* reality we must never lose sight of, not only acknowledging it, but petition God for it. We don't need a pandemic to teach us this!

"Bread" is not limited to food that nourishes our bodies (note how Jesus uses "bread" in Matthew 4:4). God's nourishment for life goes well beyond physical sustenance. Food is only the tangible expression of *all* our needs.

This petition is also a kind of admission that everything we have comes from God. Nowhere in Scripture is this clearer than in Deuteronomy 8:11-18. We would do well to read and heed it.

And so, every day and everything we have that is necessary for life comes from God. We beseech him to "give us this day our daily bread." Amen.

**A**s we continue praying for our personal needs, we move from the material (primarily) to the spiritual. Jesus teaches us about the pardon of God: "**Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.**" Here we find that God takes our relationships with one another *very* seriously.

Sin is always personal. It is a posture of being "against" another person, opposing someone, or violating some personal boundary (hence "trespass"). It entails a kind of moral indebtedness (see Colossians 2:13-14). Consequently, 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 (see especially, what comes on the heels of this Prayer, Matthew 6:14-15; also, Matthew 5:23-24).

Why is this so? Why must we first forgive others before receiving God's forgiveness? As I've noted elsewhere, "the faculty we have for receiving forgiveness and the faculty we have for granting forgiveness are one and the same thing. If we open the one we shall open the other. If we slam the door on the one, we slam the door on the other" (N.T. Wright). God's children must be a forgiving people. Freely we have received forgiveness and freely we must offer it. Failing to do the later hinders the former (more on forgiveness at <https://inchristus.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/9-Forgiveness.pdf>).

The good news is that because God leans forward in the cross of Christ offering forgiveness, we can do the same for those who have "trespassed against us."

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**T**he final petition appeals to God's protection: "**and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil.**" The prayer of a genuine worshipper knows his/her own weaknesses and acknowledges their utter dependence upon God to avoid temptation into sin.

Note: this is a prayer to avoid sin, not necessarily temptation. While sin always weakens us, temptation can strengthen us. It's important not to conflate temptation and evil. They are not the same. Consider Jesus's temptations in Matthew 4. Clearly, no evil was committed on his part and surely, he was "tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15). The request here is that God would not lead us into temptation *that would result in our sinning*. God tempts no one to sin (James 1:13-15), so this request is to "deliver us from evil," which is the goal of temptation (cf., 1 Corinthians 10:13).

Moreover, we must remember behind every attempt to lead us into evil is the "evil one," who, like a predator, is "looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Therefore, we pray for God's protection and his deliverance. Indeed, part of the whole armor of God in defense against the "schemes of the devil" is "praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (Ephesians 6:10, 18).

**I**n conclusion, Matthew's account affirms God's program, "**for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**" The rule and reign of God's kingdom by God's power for God's honor and glory will forever be present in the hearts of those who believe on the Son of God.

Jesus's model prayer shows us the paternity of God as "**our Father who art in heaven,**" the priority of God, "**hallowed be thy name,**" the plan of God, "**thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,**" the provision of God, "**give us this day our daily bread,**" the pardon of God, "**and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,**" the protection of God, "**and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil**" and the program of God "**for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.**"

May the Lord's Prayer be our prayer,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

(Note: This alliterated outline, with some modification, comes from another source. However, the comments are my own.)