

This morning, we are going to venture onto familiar ground. Some texts in God's Word are full of fascinating new truth, and are full of the unfamiliar. But there are some passages in the Bible that are common-place even to the casual church attender. There's a tendency to brush right past the familiar for obvious reasons--we've heard it before. It's such a classic to which we devote our attention this morning.

Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

What is that? We call it *The Lord's Prayer*, sixty-five of the most familiar words in the Bible. I must confess I've experienced a sense of hesitation to preach a message from such a well-known text.

Martin Lloyd-Jones made the following observation in his *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount* (Vol. 2, p. 67): "Any man who attempts to preach on the Lord's prayer must surely find himself in great difficulties. There is a sense in which it is almost presumption to preach on it at all. One should simply repeat these phrases and meditate upon them and consider them from the heart. For they themselves say everything, and the more I study this prayer the more I believe that if only one used these phrases as our Lord intended them to be used, there is really nothing more to be said."

"If the Lord's prayer is so familiar, why preach a sermon on it?" you ask. There are many reasons, but perhaps the clearest is the one raised by an individual who said (Jeremias), "Because we know it so little, and because we know it so well."

Do you want to learn how to improve your prayer life, how to move to greater heights in your communication with God, how to experience genuine power in prayer? Then you need to learn how to pray the Lord's prayer. I didn't say *recite* the Lord's prayer, for Jesus never intended these words to be merely recited. In fact, recitation of these sixty-five words may in fact be a hindrance to prayer, for as we learned last week in our examination of verses 5-8, God condemns prayer with the mouth when the mind is not engaged.

In our first study we learned *how* to pray, this morning we learn *what* to pray. In it, Jesus does not so much tell us what to *say*, but what to *pray*, that is, He provides us with a model after which we may pattern our prayers. It's a skeleton that we put meat on in the privacy of our prayer closet. So what should we pray?

Proposition: In the "Lord's prayer" in Matthew 6:9-15, Jesus gives us a pattern for prayer. In it, the Master teacher offers us two practical lessons on what to pray.

- I. We must begin with the right perspective of God (9).
 - A. He is personal.
 - B. He is powerful.
- II. We must bring the right petitions to God.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

- A. We should pray for God's glory (9-10).
 - 1. Cause Your name to be central.
 - 2. Cause Your rule to come.
 - 3. Cause Your will to be done.
- B. We should pray for our needs (11-13).
 - 1. We need bread (11).
 - 2. We need forgiveness (12, 14-15).
 - 3. We need protection (13).

Personal Reflection: Ask yourself these questions...

- 1. What place does *prayer* have in my life?
- 2. What place does *God* have in my life?

I. Lesson #1: We must begin with the right perspective of God (9).

The prayer begins and ends by adoring God--"Our Father in heaven...Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever." What's more, every statement in the prayer focuses on God, as we shall soon see.

Remember the context. Jesus is giving the sermon on the mount, a message for disciples on Kingdom Living 101. He didn't want them to be like the Pharisees nor the pagans when they prayed (the dangers of which He pinpointed in verses 5-8). Rather, here's what He expected of them.

"After this manner, therefore, pray ye" (9), literally, "pray along these lines" ("pray like this"). Each phrase in the prayer is like a handrail that guides us to the throne of grace. You say, "Is it okay to recite this prayer?" Certainly it's not forbidden to say these particular words, but mere recitation misses the point. One reason we know this is we find the *Lord's prayer* another place, in Luke 11, and in that occurrence, Jesus omits certain words and changes others. That indicates the words aren't magical, but guides.

Where should we start when we pray? Jesus said, with the correct concept of God. When we pray we must keep in balance two attributes of God.

A. He is personal. To whom do we pray? "Our Father." There's something very different about the way Jesus taught His disciples to pray (remember this is technically not the *Lord's* prayer, but the *disciples'* prayer). The Fatherhood of God is not a central in the Old Testament. And even in first century Judaism, it was rare to speak of God as "Father." The first thing that strikes us about this prayer is its intimacy.

What's the first word a child says when he learns to speak? Isn't it "daddy" (or "mommy")? I recall a scene on Kibbutz Ma'agan in Israel. Every Sabbath eve, the family of Aaron Smith would gather on the lawn of his home, including the young grandchildren. I can picture little Sachi and Yara (Israeli children about the age of two) running up to their parents and saying, "Abba, Emma ("Daddy, Mommy")!"

My friend, when we come to God in prayer Jesus says we are to approach God as our *Abba*, as children coming to a Loving Father. *Abba* is an intimate term, a homey term, in some ways the warmth of which is better denoted by our concept of "mother."

Abba was an everyday word. No Jew would have dared to address God in this manner, but Jesus did. And He gave His disciples permission to do the same. But you must become children first.

A lot of people use the Lord's prayer. It's a part of liturgical worship in many churches. It's recited by a host of athletic teams before they compete. In a sense, the world has sort of adopted this prayer, and many non-Christians use it. Is that what Jesus intended? Is this a prayer for all people? It is not. It is for disciples only.

If you are a follower of Jesus, these words will help you to pray. If you are not committed to Jesus Christ, this prayer is not for you, for God is not your Father. You need to repent of your sin, and place your trust in the Lord, then this prayer can be yours.

When we come to God, we're coming to the Father. Notice He is *our* Father. In this new approach to prayer, Jesus informs us we should never view prayer as an isolated activity between an individual and God. We have no corner on the market for God is *our* Father. We share our family relationship with Him with a lot of other people! When we pray, we should have the whole family in mind, not just "little-old-me."

When we pray, we are to view God as personal. But we must keep this in balance.

B. He is powerful. "Our Father, *the One in heaven.*" In prayer we must maintain a balance between intimacy and reverence. No, on the one hand, God is not an impersonal, cosmic force (He's our Father), yet on the other hand, He's not our buddy either. He's in heaven, and I need not remind you that we are not. The One we address in prayer is the transcendent, all-powerful Lord of the universe Who is in a class all by Himself.

Ponder what that means for us. If God was merely "our Father," we could be assured of His kindness, but what about His ability? Sure, He may want to help us, but can He? Jesus says, "Yes!" When we pray, we have access to the One in heaven, the Creator, the greatest Being in the universe! Can we have confidence when we pray? Yes!

Do you see the necessary balance in prayer? When we pray, we should be comfortable but not casual. Family talk is acceptable, flippant talk is not. Intimacy is different than irreverence. God is not "the man upstairs." Who is He? He is our Father, the One in heaven, the One Who deserves our respect and adoration, the One Who invites us to enjoy His presence but never to profane it. He is both personal and powerful.

In one of his novels, H. G. Wells tells of a man defeated by the stress of modern life. The man, who was dying, was told by his doctor that his only hope was to find fellowship with God. The individual responded, "What? *That-up-there* having fellowship with me? I would as soon think of cooling my throat with the Milky Way or shaking hands with the stars."

What kind of concept do *you* have of God? Perhaps it's not as skewed as this man's, but is it biblical? Here's the first lesson we must learn in the school of prayer. We must begin with the right perspective of God.

II. Lesson #2: We must bring the right petitions to God.

One of the amazing things about the Lord's prayer is its simplicity. It's structure follows this pattern: there's the introductory address, followed by three *Thou* requests, followed by three *Us* requests. The KJV ends the prayer with a doxology but quite likely this was added later, for reasons we'll discuss later.

Isn't it amazing that we have a Heavenly Father that gives us the privilege to *ask* Him for things?! But what should we ask? Sometimes we ask amiss, and often we don't know what to ask. What kind of requests does God want us to bring to Him? Jesus tells us we should verbalize two types of petitions when we pray.

A. We should pray for God's glory (9-10). The order of the six petitions is significant. The three *thou* petitions come first, then the three *us* petitions. We get it turned around, don't we? Where do we usually begin when we pray? With *our* needs, by telling God the things we want for ourselves. Where should we begin? Jesus says we

should first pray for God's glory. As pastor and author, John MacArthur, has observed, "When you set God in His rightful place in your prayers, everything else will flow from there."

How do we pray for God's glory? Jesus shows us by giving three requests, each of which are parallel in structure and have the same basic meaning. Dr. James Grier suggests we could translate Jesus' words this way, "Hallowed by thy name;" let me say it another way, "Thy kingdom come;" let me say it another way, "Thy will be done." When we ask God for these three things, we are praying for God's glory.

A word about the verbs Jesus used in the *Thou* petitions. They are passive.¹ "Hallowed be thy name" actually means "May You cause Your name to be hallowed." "Thy kingdom come" likewise implies a subject, "May You cause Your kingdom to come." And "Thy will be done" communicates the idea "May You cause your will to be done." Who is the implicit source of power in each of these activities? God is.

My friend, we have no inherent power to give God glory. We live in a world that mocks God, that abuses His reputation. What can we do about it? The first thing we must do is pray, and the first thing for which we must pray is for His glory, and the first admission we must make in praying for His glory is our own utter dependence upon Him.

Does it bother you when, in the name of entertainment, you see the name of God blasphemed on the television screen? Does it grieve your soul when you neighbor demeans the worship of God by refusing to worship on the Lord's day? Does it weigh heavy on your heart that the holy standards of God are being ignored by government leaders that pass legislation that authorizes the murder of unborn children?

What can we do so that God is glorified instead of slighted? The truth is, the first thing we must do is *pray*. I mean really pray! Pray with utter dependence upon Him to act. Jesus told us we should ask God to cause three things to happen in this world.

1. *Cause Your name to be central.* "Hallowed be thy name." God's name is more than a word on a page. His name is a reflection of Who He is. It's synonymous with His person. To pray concerning His name is to pray concerning His reputation.

What should we ask God to do for His reputation? Ask Him to cause it to be "hallowed." To hallow means to treat as holy. We're not asking that God may become holy--He already is holy! We're asking that He will be treated as holy, so that He will receive the unique place He deserves.

To be holy is to be *set apart*. For us, to set something apart has the idea of moving it to the peripheral, to the side (e.g. if I set apart my shoes, it means I've moved them away from me). In the biblical sense, to set apart doesn't mean to move to the peripheral, but to make something central. When we pray this petition, we are asking God to cause His name to be central in this world.

2. *Cause Your rule to come.* "Thy kingdom come." When we see the term "kingdom" we tend to think of castles, fortresses, kings, and knights. That's not what the kingdom of God is all about. It has to do with the rule of God.

Why did Jesus Christ come to this world? He came to restore a fallen creation that was in the clutches of the prince of darkness, and bring it back under the righteous rule of

¹Technically, the verb for "thy kingdom come" is middle tense, yet passive in thought.

God. He came to translate a people from being subjects of the kingdom of Satan to being subjects in the Kingdom of God.

When will Jesus establish the Kingdom of God? In the ultimate sense, at His second coming in the Messianic Age. But do you know what Jesus wants us to pray? He instructs us to pray, "Father, would you cause Your kingdom which will surely come in the future to break into history now?"

May I ask you a question? How does God answer this request? In part, He does so every time He snatches a sinner from the grasp of the devil and adopts him as a child of God. "Thy kingdom come" is an *evangelistic* prayer, a missionary prayer! When we pray "Thy kingdom come," we are asking God to exalt the King Jesus!

Are you burdened for an unsaved family member and wondering, "What can I do?" You can pray this prayer. Ask our Heavenly Father to cause His kingdom power from the age to come to break into the life of your loved one even now. This request is an admission of our utter need, "Father, I can't save my loved one. You alone can. Please cause the rule of Christ to come into his life."

3. *Cause Your will to be done.* "Thy will be done." Our priority in prayer is to be God Himself. Prayer is not to be used as an attempt to bend the will of God to fit our desires. Rather, prayer bends us to fit the will of God (MacArthur). And where is the will of God is revealed? In the Word of God. When we pray, "Father, cause Your will to be done," we are saying we want things to be done *His* way, not ours.

Is that the way you pray? Most of the time we ask for things that bring us security and health and personal happiness, don't we? Before we pray, we ought to ask ourselves how the name of God will be hallowed if He grants us our request. Often we pray things like, "Lord, give us a nice day for our picnic," or "Grant us safe traveling," or "Help me to get this job promotion." Frankly, if it rains on our picnic will the name of God somehow be defamed? Could it be that a car-breakdown is the means God wants to use to advance His kingdom? And is it possible that *not* getting the job promotion may be the very thing that will cause God's reputation to be central in your life? Jesus says pray "Thy will be done."

Where should we seek this? The final phrase in verse 10 probably modifies all three *thou* petitions, "on earth as it is in heaven." Do you know what gets priority attention in heaven? God's name does. God's kingdom does. God's will does. His name is hallowed perfectly in heaven, His kingdom reigns supremely in heaven, His will is done delightfully in heaven. And Jesus tells us to pray, "Father, as in heaven, so on earth!"

Are we really interested in God's name, God's kingdom, and God's will? How much attention have you given to those requests as compared with the amount of time you've spent asking God for personal comfort? Our prayers reflect our values.

B. We should pray for our needs (11-13). Here's an amazing truth. Our needs matter to God. True, first things first in prayer--we're to pray for God's glory first, but then He wants us to bring our needs to Him! Jesus identifies three specific, prayer needs.

1. *We need bread (11).* "Give us this day our daily bread (11)." If we're honest, we have trouble at first seeing why we need to pray this request. Why would we ask God for daily bread when we've got cupboards full not only of bread, but of everything from twinkees to Pringles potato chips!

The truth is, daily bread covers the full range of our daily necessities. In Jesus' day, bread was the staple of diet. Bread refers to all we need for our physical existence. Please realize it's not less spiritual to pray for bread than for forgiveness. We need both, and God wants us to bring both needs to Him! Martin Luther said that bread is the symbol of everything we need for the preservation of life, like food, bodily health, good weather, house, wife, children, good government, and peace. When we pray for bread, we're asking God to give us what we need. Remember, Jesus didn't invite us to pray for daily cake! Our need, yes, our greed, no.

Notice the pronouns "us" and "our" used in each of the three requests. What does that indicate? Jesus doesn't want me to pray, "Give me my bread, but *our* bread." I must not ask for anything for *me* that I am not willing to ask for *you*.

2. *We need forgiveness (12, 14-15)*. "And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." John Stott cites the head of a large British mental home as saying, "I could dismiss half of my patients if they could be assured of forgiveness." The word "debts" refers to sins, something owed to God. Forgiveness is as indispensable to the soul as bread is to the body. We need God's forgiveness, and guess what, it's available for the asking!

But is God's forgiveness conditional? Is it based on our act of forgiving others? The prayer states (12), "Forgive us our debts *as we forgive our debtors*." That's a sober warning, isn't it? But what does Jesus mean?

God's forgiveness is based on His undeserved grace. We can't earn it. But if we've received His forgiveness, we have no right to withhold forgiveness from those who "owe" us, and if we do, it reveals we have never experienced God's forgiveness to begin with. Once we've seen the enormity of our offense against God, the injuries others do to us seem trifling by comparison (Carson). We're to pass on the grace of God's forgiveness, not hoard it.

Notice the "us" again. I can't ask God to forgive me if I don't want Him to do the same for you. So serious is this that it's the only request Jesus elaborates on (14-15).

3. *We need protection (13)*. The final two clauses are actually the negative and positive aspects of the same request. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (or "the evil one")." The picture Jesus paints is alarming. In contemporary terms, visualize yourself walking through a minefield. One wrong step, and devastation occurs. As Christians, we are not immune from the attacks of the Evil One. The word Jesus uses indicates "pressure." We face pressure from all sides. Sometimes we wonder if we'll even make it. What can we do?

The final request Jesus instructs us to bring to the Father is, in essence, "Help, Father! We'll never make it without Your help! Please protect us. Your name is on the line."

The prayer ends suddenly. The doxology does not appear to belong to the text, but was added later. The addition indicates that Jesus probably intended for us to complete this prayer with our own personal words of praise.

Personal Reflection: Ask yourself these questions...

1. *What place does prayer have in my life?* Martin Lloyd-Jones said, "Man is at his greatest and highest when upon his knees he comes face to face with God." Do you pray? What changes need to take place in your life in order to pray as Jesus commanded?

2. *What place does God have in my life?* May the Lord help us to give Him the place He deserves.

Response Time:

Hymn of Response: #43 "Great Is Thy Faithfulness"

Jeanne Birch gives this thought provoking paraphrase of the Lord's prayer (see Grier).

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...but please do not ask us to exalt it audibly among those who do not hallow it.

Thy kingdom come...but not too soon: we need time to prepare for the change.

Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven...Lord, isn't this phrase just a bit idealistic? Our activities here on earth are so different from those in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread...and seconds with two patties of butter.

Do you need to change the way you pray?

Time for Response in Prayer

Song of Commitment: #426 "The Lord's Prayer"