

Main Idea: In "the Lord's prayer" in Matthew 6:5-15, the Lord Jesus teaches us both how and what to pray.

I. Jesus teaches us how to pray (5-8).

- A. Beware of your motive in prayer (5-6).
- B. Beware of your mentality in prayer (7-8).

II. Jesus teaches us what to pray (9-13).

- A. We must begin with the right perspective of God (9).
  - 1. He is personal.
  - 2. He is powerful.
- B. We must bring the right petitions to God.
  - 1. We should pray first for God's glory (9-10).
    - a. Cause Your name to be central.
    - b. Cause Your rule to come.
    - c. Cause Your will to be done.
  - 2. We should pray next for our needs (11-13).
    - a. We need bread (11).
    - b. We need forgiveness (12, 14-15).
    - c. We need protection (13).

Make It Personal: Let's ask ourselves these questions.

- 1. Am I praying?
- 2. Am I praying the Word as Jesus taught?

*Testimony for Sanctity of Human Life Sunday: Denise Hurley*

*Vote on Pastoral internship for Josiah Edwards*

**Special 2026 emphasis:** *Redeemed People...Pray the Word* – That's a special focus for us in 2026, praying the Word. This morning, we are going to venture onto familiar ground. Some texts in God's Word are full of fascinating new truth. 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 turn our attention this morning.

*Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:9-13 - 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.*

We call it *The Lord's Prayer*, sixty-five of the most familiar words in the Bible. I must confess I have 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."

So if the Lord's prayer is so familiar, why preach a sermon on it?" 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."

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

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached at WBC in 2005.

If we want to learn how to pray the Word, there's no better person to learn than Jesus, and no better passage to consider than His teaching in Matthew 6. We 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. Indeed, recitation of these sixty-five words may in fact be a hindrance to prayer, as we'll soon see..

In what we often call "the Lord's prayer" recorded in Matthew 6:9-15, Jesus gives us a pattern for prayer. In it, the Master teacher shows us both *how* and *what* to pray.

### I. Jesus teaches us how to pray (5-8).

The setting begins in verse 1. Jesus says, "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." There was much abuse of piety in first century Judaism, as there is today. It's possible to do right things for wrong reasons. Jesus gives three examples, three 'acts of righteousness', in the first half of chapter 6.

Jesus addresses almsgiving in verses 2-4, prayer in verses 5-15, and fasting in verses 16-18. What did He say is the solution for abuse in these areas? Is it to stop giving, stop praying, and stop fasting? No. According to Jesus, the solution is that we as His disciples must learn to give rightly, pray rightly, and fast rightly.

In verses 5-15, Jesus teaches us how to pray. He begins with two warnings. We're not ready to pray until we have taken inventory regarding our *motive* and *mentality*.

**A. Beware of your motive in prayer (5-6).** "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.<sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Notice an assumption in Jesus' words. "And *when* you pray." Jesus assumes that if we are His disciples, we will practice this activity. We will pray. And He makes it personal. "And *when you* [KJV, *thou*] pray." The AV points out a significant pronoun change that's missed in the modern translations. In verse one, Jesus uses the plural "ye," but in verse 5 the singular, "thou." Why the shift? Because every individual must come to grips with motive in prayer. I can't do it for you, and you can't do it for me.

Prayer was a vital part of Jewish life in Jesus' day. Every good Jew scheduled prayer time right into the daily routine, not just once, or even twice, but at least three times a day. No doubt from childhood, Jesus practiced the existing forms of Jewish piety, for all male Jews were taught the following customs.

They were taught to pray the *Shema*, a term which comes from the Hebrew word "to hear." Jews learned to recite verses from Deuteronomy 6 & 11 as soon as they could speak. Morning and evening they vocalized the *Shema* in Hebrew.

Also, three times a day the Jews prayed *Tephilla*. In the morning, at the time of the afternoon sacrifice in the Temple (around 3 P.M.), and in the evening, all good Jews prayed *Tephilla*. During these prayer times, the Jew followed a prayer guideline called "The Grand Benedictions," which, by Jesus' day was a string of eighteen benedictions which needed to be recited. Any personal matters of prayer concern were tacked on at the end. In addition, prayers were offered both before and after meals.

We must realize that when Jesus taught about prayer in Matthew 6, He was talking to people who were experienced pray-ers. Herein lies the problem. For many, prayer had become a burden, a demanding ritual. But Jesus is the Savior. He saves us from our sins, yes, that's the gospel. But He also saves us from the wrong kind of praying. He begins with two negative commands which have to do with motive.

1. *Don't try to impress people (5).* “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites.” What is a hypocrite? A hypocrite is a person who playacts, who puts on a front to hide true motivation. What does a hypocrite do when he prays? Jesus tells us what some did in that day. “For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.” They love to pray. So far, so good. But behind the good act was corrupt motive.

Who were the “they” that Jesus had in mind? Everybody listening knew who *they* were. “They” were the “men of the cloth,” those pious, respected religious teachers known as the Pharisees. But Jesus knows better. Behind their piety lurked their pride, and it showed up in two places, according to Jesus. At the synagogue. And on the street corner.

The synagogue was the place of corporate worship (think of our Sunday morning church services). Following instruction time from the Torah, a respected synagogue member was called upon to stand up front and lead in public prayer (a mark of distinction). Some people just “loved to pray” up front.

They also loved to pray on the street corner. Every afternoon at 3:00, a daily sacrifice occurred in the temple in Jerusalem. And throughout the country, all good Jews would pause at 3:00 for afternoon prayer. Guess what some Pharisees did? They timed it perfectly so that at 3:00 they just happened to be, not in the seclusion of their home, but on the downtown street corner, And there they prayed, for all to see.

Is Jesus saying that public prayer is bad, that we shouldn't have congregational prayers in church or pray before we eat in a public restaurant? No. The issue isn't location. We can pray in private or public. Solomon prayed in public, so did David and Daniel. The issue isn't posture either, for in the Bible various postures are used for prayer (kneeling, prostrate, sitting, or standing like the Pharisees). What was the problem then?

*Motive.* “That they may be *seen by men*,” says Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Do you know what a hypocrite gets when he prays? Exactly what he aims for, the applause of people. “My, what a beautiful prayer! He sure is spiritual.” But Jesus says, that's all he gets. “Verily I say unto you they have their reward.”

When you pray publicly, do you worry about what people think? By the way, we can *not* pray in public and be guilty of the same sin. If we avoid prayer meetings because we're worried about what people think of us, are we any different than the Pharisees?

This is convicting for all of us. I ask myself, “How much of what I have done in pastoral ministry has been motivated by a desire to be *noticed*, acknowledged, appreciated, and approved by people.”

But Jesus doesn't just confront the problem. He gives the solution. Don't try to impress people. Rather...

2. *Do view prayer as a family matter (6).* “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you.” Notice those words. *To your Father.* Prayer is a family conversation. Our concept of God is critical. Jesus says we need to keep three things about God in mind when we pray.

First, God is our *Father*. In His teaching on prayer, Jesus doesn't limit prayer to specific times as did the Jews. And He doesn't tell His disciples to use conventional prayer language. He wants us to think of prayer as a conversation between a child and his or her Father.

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<sup>2</sup> We can be guilty in other ways too. In conversation we can casually say, “When I was praying in my devotions this morning...” or, “Last night I had a great time in prayer...” We can use our *private* devotional life to make us sound “spiritual” in *public*.

When I was in seminary, Sherry and I attended a church that had more than a dozen professors with a Master of Divinity degree. Sort of intimidating to me. But not to a young man named Dale who also belonged to the same church. Dale didn't have an M.Div. What he did have was a debilitating disease (MS as I recall) and a genuine relationship with the Living God. When Dale prayed in church prayer meetings, he prayed with simplicity and authority because he knew he wasn't talking to those men with M.Div. degrees. He was talking to his Father.

Second, God is *unseen*. Jesus instructed, "Pray to your Father who is in *secret*." The KJV uses the term "closet" which used to confuse me. When I read that Jesus wants me to pray in my *closet* I wondered why, since if I got in my closet I'd be sitting on a stack of shoes with my head sandwiched in between a line of shirts, trousers, and suitcoats.

That's not what Jesus has in mind. He used a word which refers to the supply-room in a typical Jewish home which was the only room in a poor Jewish house that could be locked. In one sense, it was the least "spiritual" place in the house, for it was used to store feed, small animals, tools, and other supplies.<sup>3</sup> But what made it ideal for prayer was that it offered privacy.

This is quite shocking when you think about it. According to Jesus, it's no longer the Holy of Holies that's the special meeting place between a believer and God. It's the supply room that has a lock on it so no one can see you.

Do you have a private place where you get alone with God and pray? Away from external influences like the television, your phone, and your "to do" list. I once heard of a person who went to a cemetery to be alone with God. The point is, God is unseen.

Third, God *rewards*. Jesus says when we pray to our Father without trying to impress people, here's what the Father will do. He shall "see" you in secret (not "hear"), and "shall reward you openly." Amazing. God does not owe us anything, yet He loves to give good gifts to His children. And He invites us to ask.

John Piper said it well, "A prayerless Christian is like a bus driver trying alone to push his bus out of a rut because he doesn't know Clark Kent is aboard."<sup>4</sup> Oh my friends, we have an unseen Father who delights in rewarding His children! But when we pray to Him we must take heed, first, to our motive.

**B. Beware of your mentality in prayer (7-8).** Jesus is actually correcting two common misconceptions that short-circuit prayer. The first (which was verses 5-6) is the misconception of the **Pharisee**, that if what I pray sounds good to people, it'll sound good to God. The second is the misconception of the **pagan** which Jesus addresses in verses 7-8. "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do [NIV 'do not keep on babbling like pagans'], for they think that they will be heard for their many words."

1. *Don't babble* (7). The AV says, "use not vain repetitions." Deiterick Bonhoeffer calls that "empty noise." Jesus isn't condemning length and repetition in prayer, for sometimes He Himself prayed long prayers and used repetition. What is Jesus confronting here? Two common errors.

**Error #1: More is better.** "They think they will be heard because of their many words." Are they right? For pagan Romans, prayer was characterized by magical incantations, chants, and formal invocations. To get the gods to help, you had to badger them, to annoy them, to wear them out until they could do nothing else but give in!

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<sup>3</sup> Bruner, p. 234.

<sup>4</sup> From *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*.

We sometimes buy into the notion that more is better when we think that long prayers are better. The NEB puts verse 7 this way, “They imagine that the more they say, the more likely they are to be heard!”

**Error #2: The right words produce the right outcome.** The pagans viewed prayer as a mindless activity. If I say the right things, God will give me the desired results. Do we ever think that way when we pray? I knew a lady once who criticized a pastor because he didn't always end his prayers, “In Jesus' name, Amen.”

I had a basketball coach in high school who told us to pray the Lord's prayer before we played the game. That was my sophomore year. We won seven games and lost twelve (as I recall). So my junior year we didn't pray the Lord's prayer any more. And we won six games. So my senior year we prayed the Lord's prayer again.

If I can just say the right words, I'll get the right outcome. No, says Jesus. The kind of praying that pleases God involves two activities, *thinking* and *trusting*.

First, *thinking*. Have you ever switched from driving a car with standard transmission to one that has automatic transmission? Did you notice the tendency to hit the floorboard with your right foot in search of a clutch that wasn't there? Driving had become a mindless routine which was interrupted now that the clutch was gone.

What does God think of prayer chains? Some people have the notion that if you can get enough people saying the same thing to God, they'll have a greater chance of getting what they want from God. Healing, a new job, etc. Beloved, if we think that we can use volume in prayer, or frequency, to manipulate God into granting our prayer requests, we're guilty of what Jesus is here addressing.

This applies also to the use of the rosary, or the reciting of meaningful liturgy, or the practice of transcendental meditation.

God is not pleased when we approach prayer as a mindless routine. Prayer involves *thinking*. As John Stott put it, Jesus forbids any kind of prayer with the mouth when the mind is not engaged.

Prayer also involves *trusting*. Jesus says in verse 8, “Do not be like them.” Why not? “For your Father *knows* what you need before you ask him.” What a needed reminder, brothers and sisters. Our omniscient Father knows. We don't pray to inform Him. I like how Frederick Bruner put it in his commentary, “Prayer is not an intelligence briefing for God; it is intelligent conversation with him.”<sup>5</sup>

This is how we pray, according to Jesus. Before we even say the first word, we check our motive and mentality. “Search me O God and know my heart.”

## II. Jesus teaches us what to pray (9-13).

“Pray then like this,” says our Savior in verse 9. He doesn't say pray *this*, but pray *like this*<sup>6</sup>. This is not a list of words to recite. This is a pattern to follow.

**A. We must begin with the right perspective of God (9).** Prayer should be a God-centered, God-exalting activity. We begin by adoring God, “Our Father in heaven.” And we end by exalting God, “Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever,” though this ending was probably added later to provide a smoother ending. What's more, every statement in between puts the focus on God, as we shall see.

Let's remember the context. Jesus is delivering this sermon on the mount to His disciples and those who are considering becoming His disciple. He is the King. This is His manifesto, Kingdom Living 101. Jesus doesn't want His followers to be like the Pharisees nor the pagans, not in the way they pray, nor in any other way. They don't

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<sup>5</sup> Frederick Bruner, p. 237.

<sup>6</sup> Greek οὕτως “so thus, in this way”

need to try and impress God, nor reach God by their good works. By believing in Him, they become children of God.

“This, then, is how you should pray.” The AV says, “After this manner, therefore, pray ye.” Literally, “Pray along these lines.” Each phrase in the prayer is like a handrail that guides us to the throne of grace. Is it appropriate to recite this prayer? Certainly, but mere recitation misses the point. One reason we know this is that we find the *Lord's prayer* in another place, in Luke 11, and in that occurrence, Jesus omits certain words and changes others. This indicates these words aren't some sort of incantation, but guides.

Where should we begin? Jesus makes it clear that correct prayer begins with a correct concept of God, with a recognition of two attributes of God.

1. *He is personal.* To whom do we pray? To “our Father.” There's something very distinct about the way Jesus teaches His followers to pray.<sup>7</sup> The fatherhood of God is not a central theme in the Old Testament. Oh, it's there (Isa 64:8), but it's not mainstream. And even in first century Judaism, it was rare to speak of God as “Father.” The first thing we notice about prayer in Jesus' kingdom is its intimacy.

It's one of the first words to enter a child's vocabulary. I recall a scene when I was living on Kibbutz Ma'Agan in Israel in 1980. 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, Ema!”

Brethren, when we pray, Jesus says we are to approach God as our *Abba*. We come as children to the Father who has given us life, but more than that, who has given us His beloved Son and eternal life through Him. *Abba* is a tender term, a homey term, full of warmth and tenderness. *Abba* was an everyday word, a term that Jews (nor Gentiles) typically used to address God. But Jesus did. And He gives those who believe in Him permission to do the same.

But to be clear, we must become children first. Yes, to call God your *Father*, you must become His child. That a lot of people use the Lord's prayer is a fact. 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. This prayer is for disciples only, for *God's children* only.

You say, “How can I know if I'm God's child?” Answer this. Have you been born into His family? John 1:12-13 explains, “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.”

If you have received Jesus Christ as your Savior, these words are for you. If you are not His, this prayer is not for you, for God is not your Father. In order for this prayer to be yours, you must repent of your sin and place your trust in His Son.

When we come to God, we're coming to the Father. Prayer is a family conversation.

Notice He is *our* Father. In this new approach to prayer, Jesus informs us we should treat prayer as a “me and God” activity. The One with whom we are speaking is *our* Father. We share a family relationship with Him and a lot of other people who, like us, have received new birth from Him. And when we pray, we should have His whole family in mind, not just “me and Him”.

So as we enter our prayer closets, this is the perspective with which we come. God is *personal*. He is our *Father*.

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<sup>7</sup> This is technically not the *Lord's* prayer, but the *disciples'* prayer.

2. *He is powerful.* “Our Father *in heaven.*” In prayer we must maintain a balance between intimacy and reverence. 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, a being who is in a class all by Himself.

Ponder what this 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? Does He have the authority, the power? Jesus says *yes!* We are talking to the One in heaven, the Creator, the greatest Being in the universe! Can we have confidence when we pray? Absolutely!

Do you see the necessary balance? When we pray, we should be comfortable but not casual. Family talk is acceptable. Being flippant is not. Intimacy, yes, but never irreverence. He is not “the man upstairs.” He is our Father, the One in heaven who deserves our respect and adoration, who invites us to enjoy His presence but never to profane it. Personal, indeed, and powerful.

In one of his novels, H. G. Wells tells of a man defeated by the stress of life, who was dying, and 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? This is the first lesson we must learn in the school of prayer. When we pray, we must begin with the right perspective of God.

**B. We must bring the right petitions to God.** One of the amazing things about the Lord’s prayer is its simplicity. After we recognize who He is (right perspective), we then are privileged to verbalize two types of petitions. First, three *Thou* requests (*Thou* is second person singular). This is then followed by three *us* requests (first person plural).<sup>8</sup>

*First, your name be hallowed, your kingdom come, your will be done.*

*Then, give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

1. *We should pray first for God’s glory (9-10).* The three *thou* petitions come first, then the three *us* petitions. We tend to turn it around, don’t we? Where do we tend to begin when we pray? With *our* needs, right? We come to God and tell Him the things we want for ourselves. “God, please help me not get sick today, and would you help me do well on today’s math test?”

Nothing wrong with bringing our needs to the Lord, but according to Jesus that’s not where we should start. He says that prayer is about God’s glory first, then our needs. 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. I’m grateful to Jim Grier for this helpful insight. He suggested translating 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 things, we are praying for God’s glory.

A word about the verbs Jesus used in the *Thou* petitions. They are passive.<sup>9</sup> “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.

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<sup>8</sup> The KJV ends the prayer with a doxology but quite likely this was added later.

<sup>9</sup> Technically, the verb for “thy kingdom come” is middle tense, yet passive in thought.

Friends, we are living in a world that mocks God, that distorts 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.

We all have friends and family and neighbors who are ignoring the Lord, or perhaps defaming His reputation, as we ourselves once did. And it grieves us. What can we do so that God is glorified instead of slighted? Jesus says we must *pray*. We lack the ability to solve this problem. But He doesn't. Jesus says we should ask God to cause three things to happen.

**a. Cause Your name to be hallowed/central.** 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, for He already is that. We're asking that He be treated as holy, so that He receives the place He deserves in the hearts and lives of people.

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.

**b. Cause Your rule (your kingdom) to 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, to rescue the world from the clutches of the prince of darkness and bring it back under God's righteous rule. He came to establish the kingdom of God.

That's exactly what Jesus will do when He returns. He will reclaim what is rightfully His. He will establish the Messianic Age. He will create the Kingdom of God on earth.

But what does He want us to pray *now*? This is shocking. He gives us the authority, indeed, the responsibility to pray these words, "Father, would you cause Your kingdom, the one which will surely come in the future, to break into this world right now?"

How does God answer this request? "Thy kingdom come" is an *evangelistic* prayer, a missionary prayer! God answers this prayer every time He snatches a sinner from the grasp of the evil one and adopts him into His family. When we pray "Thy kingdom come," we are asking God to exalt King Jesus in people's lives now.

Some of you carry a great burden for an unsaved family member or friend and are wondering, "What can I do?" Jesus says 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 this very moment. This request is an admission of your utter need. "Father, I can't save my loved one. You alone can do that. Please do so!"

There's a third God-exalting request that Jesus taught us to bring to our Father.

**c. Cause Your will to be done.** Again, prayer is not our attempt to bend the will of God to fit our desires. Rather, prayer bends us to fit the will of God.<sup>10</sup> *Thy will be done.* And where does He reveal His will? In His Word. Keep the context in mind. Jesus is preaching a sermon that reveals the will of God. "Your will be done," then, means "Your Sermon on the Mount be done."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Observation by J. MacArthur

<sup>11</sup> Observation by F. D. Bruner, p. 247.

To put it simply, when we pray, “Father, cause Your will to be done,” we are saying we want things to be done *His* way, not ours.

Again, our tendency is to ask for things that bring us security and health and personal happiness. So before we do that, Jesus says we ought to ask ourselves how the name of God will be hallowed if He grants that request.

Before I pray, “Lord, give us a nice day for our picnic,” or “Grant us safe traveling,” or “Help me to get the job they just posted,” I need to think about God’s glory. 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 my life?

One of the most amazing phrases in the Lord’s prayer are the final words of verse 10. “On earth as it is in heaven.” I think this phrase modifies all three *thou* petitions. 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! Cause what’s important in heaven to be important in my children’s lives, in this church, in our community, in my life!

Let’s take inventory. Which is more important to us, God’s name or our own? God’s kingdom or our own? God’s will or our own? What I’ve prayed in the past week is the answer to those questions.

First and foremost, we should pray for God’s glory. Then what?

2. *We should pray for our needs (11-13)*. This is an amazing truth. Our needs matter to God. Yes, first things first. We’re to pray for God’s glory first, but then He invites us to bring our needs to Him! Jesus identifies three specific prayer needs.

a. **We need bread (11)**. “Give us today our daily bread.” If we’re honest, we struggle to see why we need to pray this request. Why would we ask God for daily bread when we’ve got kitchen cupboards full of bread, and potatoe chips and twinkies too?

When Jesus says daily bread, He’s talking about our daily necessities. For a first century Jew, bread was the staple of the diet. If you don’t have bread, you die. No bread, no sustenance, no life. If we’re going to live, we need some things and our Savior knows it and here commands us to ask for it.

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. Jesus didn’t invite us to pray for daily cake, but did command us to pray for daily bread.

And let’s not miss the pronouns “us” and “our” in each of the three requests. Jesus doesn’t want me to pray, “Give me my daily bread, but give *us our* daily bread.” I must not ask for something for *me* that I am not also willing to ask for *you*.

Are you praying for your brothers and sisters in Iran now, and North Korea, and Sudan. They need bread today. Please Father, give it to them. And use my bank account to help supply if You desire.

So, first, we need *bread* and Jesus tells us to ask for it.

b. **We need forgiveness (12, 14-15)**. Notice verse 12, “Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors [the KJV reads, ‘as we forgive our debtors’].” Were these words not coming from the lips of Jesus they would sound almost outlandish. Asking God to forgive us our debts? Try walking into the bank that holds the mortgage on your house and saying those words.

"I'd like to speak to the president of this bank. I'd like to ask him to cancel the debt I owe on my house."

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.

How can it be that we can approach the very throne of our Maker, the One we've offended by our sin and the One to whom we owe a great debt, and say, "Would You forgive me my debts?"

There's only one answer to that question, and the answer is the One speaking these words and what He did for us. You come through Me, says Jesus, and you ask the Father to forgive you your debts, and here's the response you'll receive. I guarantee it.

"Yes, I forgive you, not because you deserve it, but simply because My precious Son paid your debt when He died in your place. You are forgiven!"

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."

Friends, we all need forgiveness. And God forgives everyone who asks.

Or does He? Jesus qualified this request, "Forgive us our debts, *as we also have forgiven our debtors.*" Wait a minute. Is God's forgiveness conditional? Is it based on our act of forgiving others? Did Jesus really teach us to pray: "Forgive us our debts *as we forgive our debtors?*" He did.

Notice the "us" again. I can't ask God to forgive me if I don't want Him to do the same for you. Those are significant words, my friends, and we must not water them down. In fact, this is the only petition of the six that Jesus takes time to elaborate on.

Jesus develops this further in verses 14-15, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

What does Jesus mean? God's forgiveness is based on His undeserved grace. We can't earn it. We must simply ask for it in faith depending on God to grant it to us for Jesus' sake. Jesus' cross makes our forgiveness possible.

But His cross also makes my forgiveness of others possible, indeed, *mandatory*. Bruner says it well, "The conscience that is able to ask for forgiveness without giving it is not a conscience living in faith."<sup>12</sup>

Beloved, if we've received forgiveness from God (simply because we asked Him for it), we have no right to withhold forgiveness from those who "owe" us. If we do withhold such forgiveness, Jesus says it reveals that we have never experienced God's forgiveness to begin with.

Listen to Bruner again, "Forgiveness received and not passed on..., or forgiveness requested of God but denied to others..., is faithless forgiveness and unreal."<sup>13</sup>

Did God forgive us because He is merciful or because we deserved it? If you say, "It's His mercy; I didn't deserve it," you're right. And if we really believe forgiveness is based on mercy and not merit, we'll extend it to others.

You say, "I can't do that. The hurt I've experienced is too great. I don't have enough strength to forgive." That's partly true. You don't have enough strength to forgive your enemy *or* do a lot of other things that God requires. Jesus made that clear when He said, "Without Me you can do nothing (John 15:5)."

But the fact is, you *can* forgive, and so can I. What God commands, God enables.

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<sup>12</sup> Bruner, p. 253.

<sup>13</sup> Bruner, p. 253.

D. A. Carson rightfully points out that once we've seen the enormity of our offense against God, the injuries others do to us seem trifling by comparison.<sup>14</sup> We're to pass on the grace of God's forgiveness, not hoard it.

**c. 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 the evil one (or "from evil")."

Jesus said to pray, first, "Lead us not into temptation." He doesn't tell us here to ask for power to resist temptation, but for God to keep us from it. When a young person goes to his girlfriend's house, knowing her parents aren't there, and prays, "Lord, help us be pure," it's a little late. A better request should have been prayed earlier, "Lord, lead us not into temptation," and then stay away from that source of temptation.

And then pray, "Deliver us from the evil one." The picture Jesus paints is alarming. In contemporary terms, living for God is like 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 we're under "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, "For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen" probably does not belong to the original text, but was added later, a more polished ending. But the prayer ends roughly for a reason. It's not the end. This conversation with our Father should never end. We should pray this prayer unceasingly.

#### Make It Personal: Let's ask ourselves these questions.

1. *Am I praying?* 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." What changes need to take place in your life in order to pray as Jesus commanded?

2. *Am I praying the Word as Jesus taught?* I have a gift for you to help you pray and specifically pray the Word this year. It's called The Family Prayer Block. You'll see a table with one for every household. Men, you lead the way in this. Put a picture of every person in your family in the first slot, and then pray with your spouse for one person a day. Use the Scripture passages in the second slot to guide your prayer time. You'll see three passages, the Lord's prayer, Ephesians 6:10-18 (next week's message), and Ephesians 1:3-23 (which I'll preach on this summer).

#### **Closing Song:** #435 "*What a Friend We Have in Jesus*" (all three verses)

##### Community Group Discussion:

1. Today we continued our series, *Redeemed People Pray the Word*. How would you describe your prayer life? After discussing this question for a few moments, read together Matthew 6:5-13. What stands out most to you from Jesus' teaching on prayer?

2. What are some tendencies we must avoid when we pray according to verses 5-8?

3. According to Jesus, our prayers should follow a basic pattern when we pray. What is that pattern according to verses 9-13?

4. Let's probe the previous question more carefully. How does Jesus say we should we address God when we pray? What does He say we should pray about *first*? What kinds of prayer requests should we bring to God next, according to Jesus? Should we ever deviate from this pattern when we pray, and if so, when and how?

5. What questions did today's message raise for you? What encouragement did it provide? After discussing, allow the Lord's prayer to guide you as a group in a time of meaningful conversation with our Heavenly Father.

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<sup>14</sup> Observation by D. A. Carson