

THE LORD'S PRAYER
Matthew 6:5-15 (Luke 11:1-4)
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There is a *Family Circus* cartoon in which Little Billy is saying the Lord's Prayer before going to bed. He puts it in a way that probably portrays how we often really feel. He says, ". . . give us our trespasses as we give it to those who trespass against us."

I am sure that many of you have heard the story about a child who did not understand what the Lord's Prayer was all about. Finally, the child told his parents that he now knew God's name. They asked him how he could possibly know, and he answered that it came from this prayer. "Our Father, who art it heaven. Howard be thy name." Howard! That's God's name!

All joking aside, "The Lord's Prayer," as it is commonly called, might more aptly be called "The Disciples' Prayer." After all, it is not so much Jesus' own prayer as it is the model He gave His disciples. Both Matthew and Luke record this prayer (Matt 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4), and there are many differences in the accounts. The simplest and most satisfying solution is that Jesus Himself taught this form of prayer on more than one occasion.¹ For our study today, we will focus on Matt 6:5-15. Let us read that text together.

^{6:5}"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶But whenever 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.

⁷"When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹"Pray then in this way:

¹D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 8 (Zondervan, 1984), 166-168.

Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name.
¹⁰Your kingdom come.
 Your will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹Give us this day our daily bread.
¹²And forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³And do not bring us to the time of trial,
 but rescue us from the evil one.
¹⁴For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive
 you; ¹⁵but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your
 trespasses (Matt 6:5-15, NRSV).

First, Jesus taught His disciples how not to pray. We are not to pray with the intent to impress others with our beautiful petitions or to impress God with our bountiful pleadings. Secretly, sincerely, and simply we are to speak in prayer to God our Father. *Second, Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, not what to pray.* The Lord’s Prayer is a model prayer for those who would imitate Jesus. And while it is certainly appropriate at times to repeat this prayer, “the Lord’s Prayer is not so much a command as an invitation: an invitation to share in the prayer-life of Jesus Himself.”² *Third, the prayer is stated in six simple, short petitions.*³ The first three are cast in terms of God’s glory: “*your name . . . your kingdom . . . your will.*” The last three are cast in terms of humanity’s needs: “*give us . . . forgive us . . . deliver us.*” G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945), a brilliant British preacher who died in 1945, observed: “Prayer only fulfills the Master’s ideal when it begins with the interests of God and follows with the needs of man. I am afraid that order rebukes very much of our praying.”⁴ Now, let us to turn our attention to the words of the Lord’s Prayer.

Our Father in heaven. “Our”—plural—indicates that this is an example of a prayer to be prayed in fellowship with other disciples. God is the God of us all, and there is to be a

²N. T. Wright, “The Lord’s Prayer as a Paradigm of Christian Prayer,” in R. N. Longenecker, ed., *Into God’s Presence: Prayer in the New Testament*, McMaster New Testament Studies (Eerdmans, 2001), 132.

³Scholars debate whether Matthew’s version has six petitions (Chrysostom, Calvin, and Reformed theologians) or seven, interpreting v. 13 as two (Augustine, Luther, most Lutheran theologians). The issue has little effect on the meaning of the prayer.

⁴G. Campbell Morgan, *The Practice of Prayer* (Fleming H. Revell, 1906), 70.

spiritual connection between praying privately and praying publicly. As we will see in the request for forgiveness, the Father takes seriously how we treat His children. The address “our Father in heaven” also presents the great paradox of the nature of God.⁵ He is our Father. He is near; He is close to us. He knows our needs and He cares for us. At the same time, He is in heaven. He is God, not human. He is the sovereign, transcendent ruler of the universe. By calling God our Father in heaven, we come to Him boldly, as we would to our own earthly father, but we also bow face down before Him, unworthy to lift our eyes to His glory.

Hallowed be Your name. There are at least two dimensions to this phrase: reverence and revelation. Reverence: to pray that God’s name be hallowed—that it be made holy—is not to pray that God may become holy but that He may be treated as holy, that His name not be despised or disgraced by the words and deeds of those who have been created in His image. Revelation: God reveals Himself to us by His name, and He has more fully revealed His name and nature to us in Jesus Christ. To pray that God will make His name holy is to pray that He will reveal Himself in our world.

Your kingdom come. This is the pivotal point of the prayer, and I will return to it at the conclusion of this sermon. In the person of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God was breaking into the world in a bold and robust way. But that kingdom, begun in the ministry of Christ, will not be consummated until the end of the age. To pray “Your kingdom come” is to ask—at one and the same time—for both the saving spread of God’s kingdom and for the final fulfillment of His kingdom. We cry out for the victory of the kingdom and we cry out for the return of the King. We passionately pray that God will reign, not only at the end, but today in our lives.

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. God’s bidding is followed perfectly in heaven. We pray the day will come when it is followed perfectly on earth. As children of the heavenly Father, we must hallow His name, submit to His reign, and do His will. It is impossible to pray this prayer in sincerity without humbly committing ourselves to such a course.

⁵Gary Holloway, *In the Name of Jesus: Receiving Power from the Prayers of the New Testament*, A Faith Focus Book (Sweet, 1994), 8.

Give us this day our daily bread.⁶ “The prayer is for our needs, not our greeds.”⁷ As disciples of Jesus, not only do we live one day at a time, we also realize that all good things, even our ability to work and earn our food, are gifts from the hand of God. We may also be reminded of God’s gift of manna to the Israelites in the wilderness. Manna was not needed in Egypt and it was not needed in the promised land. So the gift of bread signals that we have begun the journey, but we have not yet arrived.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. The first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer stand independently from one another. The last three petitions, however, are linked by “ands”—note the first word of vv. 12 and 13 is “and”—as if to say that life sustained by food is not enough. We also need forgiveness of sin and deliverance from evil. Our sin is spoken of as a huge debt that we cannot repay. The enormity of the debt that God has forgiven should prompt us to forgive our debtors. Jesus is not saying that forgiving others earns our forgiveness; rather, forgiveness of others should be such a feature of our lives that it is a given fact. To fail to forgive is to fail to see the enormity of one’s own sin.

Do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. The final request of the Lord’s Prayer is for God’s help in overcoming evil. Today, belief in Satan, “the evil one,” is silly and superstitious to some. But the truth is, the Evil One is close at hand and he is powerful. And so, seeing our own helplessness before Satan whom Jesus alone could vanquish,⁸ we seek deliverance from Satan’s strength and schemes by trusting in our heavenly Father.

The doxology—“for Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen”—is found in various forms in many manuscripts. This variety, in and of itself, renders the doxology suspicious, and the manuscript evidence overwhelmingly suggests that it is an addition, and therefore not an original part of the Lord’s Prayer. In the

⁶This is the most problematic phrase of the prayer due to the disputed derivation of ἐπιούσιος (*epiousios*). Does it denote the *current* day (“Give us this day our *daily* bread.”) or the *following* day (“Give us this day our bread *for tomorrow*.”)? I concur with those who translate this petition as follows: Luke 11:3—“Give us each day our bread for the coming day”; Matt 6:11—“Give us today our bread for the coming day.” Carson, *Matthew*, 171, notes: “This may sound redundant to Western readers, but it is a precious and urgent petition to those who live from hand to mouth.” Like Luther, I tend to think that “bread” suggests all that we need in the physical realm.

⁷Carson, *Matthew*, 171.

⁸See Matt 4:1-11.

tradition of the praying church, the doxology has become a part of the Lord's Prayer and it is, on its own merits, appropriate and awe-inspiring. It seems especially suitable to those who see in the last three petitions a veiled allusion to the Trinity: the Father's creation and providence provides our bread, the Son's atonement secures our forgiveness, and the Spirit's indwelling power assures our safety and victory.

As I pointed out earlier, the pivotal phrase of the Lord's Prayer is "Your kingdom come." "All of our prayers must have this same sense of anticipation that the kingdom of this world has become, is becoming, and will become the kingdom of our Lord and Christ."⁹ But how does this happen? What is the power that makes this possible? And how do you and I participate in that power? What part do you and I play in hastening the coming of God's kingdom?

The answer, I must confess, stunned me. My mind was stupefied by my failure to perceive what was always there. My heart was stricken by my failure to practice what should always be there. And my soul was stirred when, at last, I saw the simplicity of the secret of the spread of the kingdom. The answer is this: "we are to pray God's kingdom into existence 'on earth as it is in heaven.'"¹⁰ . . . *We are to pray God's kingdom into existence. . . .* The implications are stunning. I must so live my life that when others see me, they perceive that I am a child of the holy God, and they praise my heavenly Father. I must submit my will to the will of the sovereign King of heaven and earth. It is hypocrisy to pray that God's will be done and then to live as if I were the lord of my life. And it is blasphemy to pray for the kingdom and pledge allegiance to the King, and then live as I please. I must trust in my Creator for my body's sustenance, and I must feed my soul on the Bread of Life. Because of my awareness of the enormity of my sin and the appreciation of the magnitude of God's forgiveness, forgiving others must be for me a way of life. To request forgiveness while refusing to forgive, is to spit in the face of the human Jesus while driving the nails into the divine Christ. Finally, in my struggle against the Evil One, I must surrender to the strength of the Holy One. Without the King, I cannot survive the assaults of the enemy. It is the King of the kingdom who supplies my strength and my security. To ask for deliverance and yet align myself with the enemy is

⁹Holloway, *In the Name of Jesus*, 13.

¹⁰Wright, "The Lord's Prayer as a Paradigm of Christian Prayer," 151.

treason, punishable by eternal death. To pray for the coming of God's kingdom, is to pray for my transformation into the likeness of the holy King.

We are to pray God's kingdom into existence. Our most urgent need here, at the Plymouth Church of Christ, is not for servants with time on their hands. As good as that would be—and it would be good—it is not our most urgent need. What we need most are saints with time on their knees. As strange as it may sound, the hands and feet will follow the knees.

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
 but rescue us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen.