

The Gospel of Matthew

SERMON ON THE MT: PRAYER (6:7-15)

In the gospel of Luke, we read an account of the disciples observing Jesus in prayer. After He concluded, one disciple asked Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” (Luke 11:1) Jesus’ response was the Lord’s Prayer. It is also found in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount.

It must have been awesome to observe Christ in prayer. No doubt all of the disciples prayed before they met Christ. They were all believers with the exception of Judas Iscariot; however there was something unique and powerful about our Lord in prayer. We never hear of the disciples asking Jesus how to cast out demons, heal the sick, raise the dead, or walk on water. The one time they were unable to cast out a demon, Jesus responded by pointing out the deficiency in their prayer life. (Mark 17:21) Truly, the powerful prayer life of Jesus Christ undergirded the power of His ministry. Lord, teach us to pray!

We studied the importance of a private prayer life in our last lesson covering Matthew 6:5-6. In the verses leading up to the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus addresses the confusion of the heathen (Gentiles) and sets forth an important premise upon which the model prayer built. What do we learn from this? We learn that what you believe about God affects how you worship God.

Good prayer is built upon good theology.

~~Repeat after Me~~ (6:7)

Prayer is not exclusive to Christianity or Judaism. Many religions and cults include forms of prayer to various “deities”, spirits, or even the spirits of those who have died. Ritual prayer is commonplace among other religions and is unfortunately used in some denominations that call themselves Christian. These ritual prayers may prescribe specific words, body positions, locations, clothing, ritual cleansing, repetition of words, time(s) of day, etc... While Jesus’ disciples were Jewish, they lived under Roman authority and no doubt were familiar with the religious practices of the Gentiles.

Let’s consider this from a foundational level. The Lord is explicitly clear in Scripture that He is the ONLY God and Savior and there never has been nor ever will be another. (Isaiah 43:10-11) Prayers to any other deity are prayers offered to a false god with no power to save. (Isaiah 45:20-22) As men have rejected the true and living God and turned to idols (Romans 1:21-23), they also have turned from the natural and moral attributes of the Living God to embrace gods of lesser ability and moral fortitude... even in their own minds!

Consider the gods of the Greeks and Romans. They never had just one god; there were a multitude. They had specific powers wielded in certain areas. Their behavior was similar to the characters of soap opera dramas of our day. The most prominent monotheistic (belief in only one god) non-Judeo-Christian religion of our day is Islam. They also practice ritual prayer with very strict requirements. What we find is that those who reject the true God fundamentally reject who He is, which affects how they worship their god(s). This is exactly what Jesus says!

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It is important to learn how to pray and what to avoid, but what is even more important is to know WHY we pray and WHO we are praying to. According to Jesus, why do the heathen use vain (meaningless) repetitions? There is probably more than one right answer to this question. I would propose the following thoughts. They don't believe their god is:

- always _____;
- _____ of their need; or
- really _____ about them and has to be _____ to help.

Stop right now before you go any further! Are these feelings of disbelief harbored in your heart? If so, I suggest you focus on working out those issues first. Remember: *good prayer is built on good theology*. The heathen repeats themselves over and over because they don't think that their god hears them the first time. Although we may not repeat prayers or have a Book of Common Prayer like some denominations, we can still fall into the same mentality. Let me clarify; I am not criticizing a petition brought before the Lord multiple times until it is resolved. Importunity (unrelenting prayer) is encouraged in Scripture. (Luke 18:1-8) We need to understand that the reason for importunity is the submission of our heart, not because of some defect in the character or ability our God.

The Four Pillars of Prayer (6:8-9a)

Sometimes we tend to overcomplicate things. In trying to plumb the depths of this infinite God of ours, we stumble over our words and confuse concepts that are meant to be simple. Prayer is all about who God is. It is a transforming experience for those who both humbly and boldly approach their Father.

In contrast to the Gentiles, we have a God of infinite power and virtue. Jesus alludes to this when He says, "your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye:" He establishes a few facts about our Father and makes them the basis of the Lord's Prayer. I want to be a little bit more expansive than the text and establish the four pillars of prayer.

Pillar #1: The _____ of God

Read Psalm 139:1-6 and Isaiah 65:24. How does this fact affect our prayer life?

Pillar #2: The _____ of God

Read Psalm 139:7-12 and John 4:20-23. How does this fact affect our prayer life?

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Pillar #3: The _____ of God

Read Genesis 18:14, Luke 1:36-37 and Matthew 21:21-22. How does this fact affect our prayer life?

Pillar #4: Our _____ before God

Read Romans 8:15 and the introduction to the Lord's Prayer. How does this affect our prayer life?

Don't be discouraged by your lack of knowledge or depth. Like a good father, the Lord doesn't expect us to run before we can walk, nor walk before we crawl. Read Romans 8:26-27 and discuss.

What about faith? Real faith is based on truth. We must believe (have faith in) these truths to pray to God effectively.

If our Father already is aware of our need, what is the purpose of prayer?

As we begin our study of the Lord's prayer, we should first emphasize that Jesus said, "after this manner therefore pray..." What is the significance?

In this manner –

The Lord's prayer would more appropriately be named, "The Model Prayer". It is an important teaching, but it is a means by which we learn to pray and not as a prayer in itself. How can we emphatically deny that the Lord did not intend for this prayer to be memorized and repeated as prayer?

The Lord's Prayer is like a frame upon which a house is built. We only have a vague idea of what a house will look like from the frame. Similarly, the Lord's Prayer is only an outline of proper prayer.

Hallowing the Name (6:9b)

We established that we are praying to our Father, but not just any father. Remember the four pillars of prayer. The first three pillars revolve around the identity (natural attributes) of our God. The fourth pillar is our standing with God. It is no surprise that Jesus begins this prayer by calling us to these pillars. To hallow our Father's name is to build our prayer upon these pillars.

Hallowed –

Hallowed provides a necessary counter-balance to “Our Father”. The saved have a wonderful and undeserved relationship and access to God, but at the same time, He is still the holy God. He is the potter and we are the clay.

What are we hallowing? It is His name. Generally, what significance does one's name have in the Bible? Read 1 Samuel 18:30, Proverbs 22:1, and John 1:40-42.

What significance does God's name have? Read Psalm 113, John 17:6-12, 20:31, Acts 3:6, and Philippians 2:10.

What is the name of our God? Read Genesis 17:1, Exodus 34:5-7, 2 Samuel 22:1-2, and Matthew 1:21.

“O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together” – Psalm 34:3

How do we hallow God's name in prayer?

How has God revealed Himself to you? What are you thankful for? Take it to Him in prayer!

Reign Over Us! (6:10)

This passage presents some challenges because the concept of the kingdom is thrust upon us for clarification. Keep in mind that Jesus devotes quite a bit of His teaching to the concept of the kingdom and it was clear that even the disciples that walked with Him were perplexed by the subject (Luke 19:11). We are not going to make a definitive statement on the kingdom here, largely because I am not settled in my own mind. We will however, try to understand the point Jesus makes in this verse.

A BIT OF ETYMOLOGY

In Greek, the word “kingdom” is in the same family of words as “king” and “to reign”. It is the noun form of the verb “to reign”, describing the actual exercise of authority. To English minds, the word kingdom often denotes a geographical territory. Understanding the meaning of this word will provide some clarity.

Regarding the conjugation of “thy kingdom come” in Greek, we find that this is not a statement about what has already happened. It is a request for Jesus’ reign to begin, effective immediately. In his New Testament Word Study, Spiros Zodhiates says, “The aorist imperative denotes a command, request, or entreaty. Unlike the Present Imperative, it does not involve a command or entreaty for continuous or repetitive action. Instead, it is often used for general exhortations and for things that must be begun at that very moment.”¹ Another acceptable translation of this passage might be, “Let your reign over us begin, accomplishing your will on earth just as it is in heaven.”

As prophesied, (Daniel 2:44-45) I believe we see the beginning of the kingdom during the ministry of Jesus Christ. He was born a King (Matthew 2:2) of the Jews, ministered as a King (John 1:49, Zechariah 9:9), died a King (John 18:33-37, 19:19) and resurrected a King (Acts 2:31-36). While many Jewish minds expected a physical manifestation of the Kingdom, Jesus made it clear that the onset of the Kingdom could not be physically observed (Luke 17:20-21) and was actually already among them. In fact, Jesus told His disciples that some of them would actually witness the Son of Man coming in His kingdom before they died (Matthew 16:28, 17:1-3). Only three of the twelve had this experience.

We also must keep in mind that the Scriptures speak of a future fullness of the kingdom in the last days. Passages such as Revelation 11:15-18 and 12:10-12 speak of the Kingdom coming in power to complete the work of overcoming Satan and establishing the reign over Christ over all things. While we can speak of the Kingdom (the reign of Christ) as having already begun, it is also proper to recognize that He has not yet subjected all things to Himself and therefore there is more to come.

We must now ask ourselves, what does this have to do with prayer? How do these truths teach us to pray? Jot down some of your initial thoughts on the subject.

¹ The Complete WordStudy New Testament, edited by Spiros Zodhiates, Th.D., Grammatical Notations

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The fullness of verse 10 is a request for God to reign over us so that His will is accomplished on earth, just as in heaven. We must understand what is referred to as His “will”. Based on my studies, there are three aspects of God’s will.

- _____ Will – what He will accomplish, no matter what (Proverbs 21:1 & 2 Chronicles 20:6)
- _____ Will – what He desires to accomplish (Ezekiel 33:11 & 2 Peter 3:9)
- _____ Will – what He will allow to happen (Psalm 81:8-11 & Matthew 23:37)

Which aspect of God’s will are we praying to be accomplished?

In this context, is God’s will always accomplished on earth?

Is God’s will accomplished in heaven? Read Psalm 103:20 and Luke 10:18.

Praying, “thy Kingdom come” is praying for Christ to overcome the damage caused by Satan and the foolishness of Adam in the garden. Adam subjected himself to the reign of Satan over his heart, as he willingly followed him. Satan became the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan tarnished the name of God in the eyes of men and usurped His place in their heart (Matthew 6:24). Praying “thy Kingdom come” is praying for the reversal of the fall by God’s glorification and the renewing of His reign over the hearts of men, either by salvation and sanctification or by the exercise of His power.

Remember that this is the model prayer. How does verse 10 play out in our prayers in a practical way? Read Romans 12:1-2, 1 Timothy 2:1-4, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Thessalonians 3:1.

Finally, recall that “thy Kingdom come, thy will be done...” is prayed in the context of, “hallowed be thy name”. Why is the order important in the model prayer?

Day by Day (6:11)

To those accustomed to plenty of food (that's us Americans), this passage may appear insignificant. Remember though, this prayer is the model for all Christians, not only those in third world countries. As we have witnessed devastating natural disasters strike our country in recent months, we remember that the bounty we have is a blessing and not a right. Each breath comes from God and is derived from His love. We should take our petitions for the basics of life to our God and give Him thanks as He proves Himself to be the Great Provider day by day.

Of all the things the Lord could teach us to pray for, why bread? What is significant about it? Read Genesis 47:15, Matthew 4:4, and 1 Timothy 6:8.

A sister passage to Matthew 6:11 is Luke 11:3, which reads, "Give us day by day our daily bread". Although similar, there is enough difference to provide more insight into the Lord's intent. Why day by day? Read Exodus 16:4, Psalms 34:10 and Proverbs 30:8-9.

How does this harmonize with our instruction to "take no thought" for our needs in Matthew 6:25-34?

How should we expect for God to answer this prayer? Read Genesis 3:17-19 and 2 Thessalonians 3:8-12.

What does this passage teach us about the frequency of prayer?

What if we receive more than we need each day? Read 2 Corinthians 9:8-11 and 2 Timothy 6:17-19.

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Living Debt Free (6:12,14-15)

In his commentary on Matthew, John MacArthur says, “Nothing in the Christian life is more important than forgiveness – our forgiveness of others and God’s forgiveness of us.”² Given our penchant for sin, it isn’t surprising that forgiveness is incorporated into the model prayer. Let’s begin by defining key terms.

Forgive –

Debts –

There are five words used for sin in the New Testament. Each one portrays a different aspect of sin (*sin* - missing the mark; *trespass* – slipping or falling; *transgression* – going across the line; *lawlessness* – intentional disregard of God’s law; and *debt* – signifying something we owe God because of our sin). Consider Exodus 19:1-8, John 19:7, and Romans 2:11-15. How is the concept of debt tied to sin?

Fundamentally, what is this passage teaching us about prayer? Read John 13:5-11 John 1:8-9.

For the saved, we are praying for forgiveness of our sins against our Father. Look to the parable of the prodigal for the best illustration. We owe Him a debt of obedience (Luke 17:10). When we sin, we fail to obey but instead work against His will. We need His forgiveness to go forward in fruitfulness.

Why must we be willing to forgive others? Read John 13:4, Rom. 13:8, and 1 John 3:16.

While others may be in debt to us because of sin, we are in debt to them because of grace.

Why does God tie our receipt of forgiveness to our administration of forgiveness? Read Matthew 5:3-16

² “The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7”, John MacArthur, p. 395.

What are the practical implications of a Christian being unwilling to forgive? Read Matthew 18:21-35 and Psalm 66:18.

If you are hungry for grace, give grace. Remember the widow and her mite! Because of her poverty, she gave all that she had. The only way to multiply her mite was to give it away (the only sure investment). The same holds true for you, Christian. Give grace and mercy freely.

Not Trials, but Deliverance (6:13a)

This passage is challenging. As with all of God's Word, there is important truth for us, but it isn't always easy to draw out. Proverbs 25:2 tells us, "*It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.*" We undertake a royal work when we set our hearts and minds to understand and apply the Word of God.

This passage is challenging because at first blush, its underlying premise appears to contradict clear biblical principles. Sometimes I begin my study of a passage by asking questions. Don't be afraid to ask the hard questions; some of your greatest joys in studying come when God brings light to an area that was previously dark in your mind. I actually typed up some questions when I started meditating on this passage:

- In light of James 1:2-4, why should we pray to be kept from trials if they are for our good?
- In light of James 1:13, will the Lord lead us into trials?

As I study, one of my first steps is to define the words I am working with; this is essential for Matthew 6:13. Let's look at the words, "temptation" and "evil".

Temptation –

Evil –

How does this help us begin to answer our questions? Read Genesis 22:1 and Deuteronomy 8:2-3.

If we are speaking of "temptation" as a trial or test and not as an enticement to sin, why do we pray to be delivered from evil (or the "evil one" as indicated by some translations)?

Another thing I try to do in my study is to find parallel passages of Scripture (Scriptures that deal with the same subject). The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge is an indispensable tool for this task. We should interpret Scripture with Scripture.

After I've examined that passage in its context, understood the words and wording of the passage, and studied parallel passages, I usually come up with a "working theory" about the meaning. I mull it over in my mind, testing it against principles from Scripture and against practical situations I have faced or know of. I also look at commentaries written by knowledgeable and godly men who have wrestled with these passages before. The truth was not born with me; neither will it die with me. If I am the first person to ever come up with a certain interpretation of the passage, it is very possible I am wrong.

To my comfort, I found that I was not the first person to face confusion over this passage. In his commentary on Matthew, John MacArthur said, "As James tells us, God does not tempt. So why ask Him not to do what He would never do anyway? Yet James also tells us we should rejoice when trials come and not seek to avoid them. So why should we pray, do not lead us into temptation?"

The answer to my questions (and MacArthur's as well) come from an attitude that Christians should possess and maintain. **Don't go looking for trouble. Flee trials!** Let's consider this attitude in some different Scriptural scenarios.

- Agur: Proverbs 30:8 –
- Jabez: 1 Chronicles 4:10 –
- Jacob: Genesis 32:11 –
- Peter: Luke 22:31, 40 –

What happens if we don't pray to avoid trials and flee them? Read Luke 22:54-62.

What if we are wrapped up in a trial? Is all hope lost? Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 and 2 Peter 2:9.

A trial is a trial because it is a trial; don't minimize it. Trials are excruciating and will expose your weaknesses. Without God's grace to withhold trials or carry you through them, you will not stand!

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If we are to pray for deliverance from trials, are trials necessary? Read Luke 8:13, 1 Corinthians 11:19, 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 and James 1:2-4.

Why should we pray to avoid trials? Read 1 Corinthians 9:27, 2 Corinthians 13:5-6 and 2 Timothy 2:22.

A.T. Robertson described this passage well when he said, “The idea is then: ‘Do not allow us to be led into temptation.’ There is a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13), but it is a terrible risk.”³

Finally, I want to conclude by making sure we strike the right balance. Job was a man who appeared to live in a constant fear of the consequences of sin (Job 1:5). He embraced the spirit of Matthew 6:13 by seeking to avoid trials. However, when trials did come, not because of his sin but because of the sovereignty of God, he ultimately crumpled. Where did Job fail to strike the right balance?

2 Corinthians 4:17 – “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory;”

Doxology (6:13b)

A doxology is praise, giving glory to God and making much of Him; it literally means, “glory words”. The conclusion to the model prayer, as we read in the King James Version, is definitely classified as doxology. In studying the ancient Greek source texts, there is not a consistent inclusion of this final stanza in Matthew 6:13. The oldest Greek texts do not have this conclusion and simply end with, “... but deliver us from evil”, consistent with what we read in Luke 11:1-4.

For the purpose of discussion, where did this doxology come from if it was not originally spoken by Christ in this passage? The answer of course is that some person added these words because they felt it completed the prayer in a more appropriate manner. But why choose these words? Fortunately, they are not without precedent in Scripture. Read 1 Chronicles 29:11, Psalm 145:10-13, 1 Timothy 1:17, 6:15-16 and Revelation 5:13-14. What do these passages have in common?

³ “A.T. Robertson’s Word Pictures”, Matthew 6:13.

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I don't want to leave out this passage because the issue isn't clear. If it is the inspired Word of God, we need to hear it and embrace it. The best course of action is to carefully interpret this passage in accordance with the meaning of other more certain texts. **In other words, don't hang a doctrine on an uncertain passage.** Fortunately, these concluding words closely correspond to the beginning of the prayer and other more certain texts of Scripture from which we will derive their meaning.

Consider what we have discussed thus far concerning the kingdom (review pgs 5-6). Why would we conclude with the exclamation, "thine is the kingdom"?

Power is defined as the ability to accomplish work. A king with no authority or standing military is powerless. A car with no gasoline is powerless. They can do nothing. Why pray, "thine is... the power"?

God's glory is the express brightness of His person. God is glorious because He is the only true God. His attributes make Him glorious in beauty and should provoke the adoration of all the world. Why pray, "thine is... the glory"?

The kingdom, power, and glory of the Lord are not limited in quantity or in time. They are infinite and perpetual. Thus, thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory FOR EVER. Our God is both unchangeable (immutable), and eternal. As Exodus 15:18 says, "The LORD shall reign for ever and ever."

Amen is a simple word used in 126 passages in the New Testament, sometimes twice in one passage. Every time Jesus used the word, it is translated as "Verily", and used at the beginning of a teaching, with the exception of Matthew 6:13 in which it is translated as, "Amen". The writers of the gospels, epistles, and Revelation use it at the end of a thought or the book itself and it is translated as, "Amen". It means, "truly" or "surely". Why is it the appropriate conclusion to prayer?

Whether this conclusion is truly part of the original text or not, it serves as a useful reminder of whom we are praying to and what we are praying about.

In Summary

We have covered a lot of principles over the last few pages and I wanted to create a brief summary that would help us to remember what we have learned. Because we all learn differently, I've come up with two mnemonic devices: The Nine P's of Prayer and The ABC's of Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer	The Nine P's	The ABC's
Our Father		
Which Art in Heaven		
Hallowed be thy name		
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.		
Give us this day our daily bread.		
And forgive us our debts		
As we forgive our debtors.		
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.		
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.		