

The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:9-15

Key Verse: 6:9b,10

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

In the last lesson we learned the importance of living before God in practicing acts of righteousness: giving to the needy, prayer and fasting. Among these acts, prayer is the one that relates us to God. Prayer is the source of power to practice acts of righteousness. In verses 5-8, we learned the attitude of prayer. In verses 9-15, we learn the contents of prayer. We call this “The Lord’s Prayer,” and it is a model prayer. This prayer has been uttered by countless people on many occasions down through the generations: by passengers on airplanes that were in danger, by soldiers in battle, and by people facing natural disasters. Sometimes people pray this prayer without knowing its meaning. Even so, God is pleased and has mercy in their time of need. However, we should not pray only in emergencies. Prayer is the way to grow in our personal relationship with God. God wants us to share his heart's desire. When we pray according to God’s heart’s desire, he is pleased to answer our prayers.

Some people lament that God does not answer their prayers, even though they pray a lot. There may be many reasons for this. One is that we ask with wrong motives, to spend what we get on our pleasures (Ja 4:2-3). God may not even hear this kind of prayer. On the other hand, 1 John 5:14,15 says, “...that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.” When we pray genuinely, according to God’s will, he answers. Let’s learn this kind of prayer as we study the Lord’s Prayer.

The Lord’s Prayer consists of mainly two parts. The first part concerns God himself and his heart’s desire. The second part concerns human need. Many people want to begin their prayer from the second part. But our goal should not be to get something from God, but to meet him personally. When our relationship with him is right, he generously meets our needs. We should not be self-centered in our prayer, but God-centered, first and foremost. So let’s pay close attention to the first part of the Lord’s Prayer.

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I. Our Father God and his heart's desire (9-10)

First, “Our Father in heaven” (9). This is how we should address God. God is not our buddy, our boss or our president, but our Father. During Jesus' time, this was revolutionary. Prior to this, people considered that God was so holy, he was almost unapproachable. In the Old Testament, only the high priest could come into God's presence. He came just once a year and also needed forgiveness to stand before God. Ordinary people could not imagine to approach God without a mediator. But Jesus became our unique, everlasting Mediator who forgave all our sins through the shedding of his blood (1 Ti 2:5). Through Jesus, God adopted us as his own children who can call him, “**Abba, Father**” (Gal 4:6). So we can come to God freely with confidence to enjoy an intimate love relationship (Eph 3:12). What a great privilege this is! We can come to God just as we are, calling, “Father! Daddy!”

Our Father “in heaven” is different from our earthly father. Earthly fathers are imperfect and weak. They disappoint and even wound their children. Some children dislike or hate their fathers. They can easily misunderstand their heavenly Father. That is why we must know that our Father “in heaven” is very different from our earthly father. Our earthly fathers are temporary, but our heavenly Father is everlasting (Isa 9:6). Our earthly fathers make mistakes, but our heavenly Father is perfect. Our earthly fathers can be sick and weak, but our heavenly Father is always strong; he is the Almighty Creator God with whom nothing is impossible. Most importantly, our heavenly Father loves us so much that he sacrificed his one and only Son Jesus for us. Our heavenly Father is well described in the parable of the prodigal son. We are like the second son in the parable. We ran away from God, squandered his wealth, and sinned against him greatly. But when we come back, our heavenly Father forgives us and embraces us with an unconditional, never-ending love. Our heavenly Father is good and everything he does for us is good (Ro 8:28). Our earthly fathers need their heavenly Father. So instead of complaining about them, we should pray for them to accept their heavenly Father. Since God is “our” Father, all believers are brothers and sisters in his family. We are not in a rigid hierarchy, but in a family. **We are not enemies or competitors, but family members. That is why we love one another, show concern for one another, and pray for each other. Prayer is not burdensome; it is enjoying a deep love relationship with our Father God. This is where prayer begins.**

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Second, “hallowed be your name” (9). What does “hallowed be your name” mean? Simply speaking, it means “holy be your name.” It means to honor God as God. Who is God? His two great attributes are love and holiness (1 Jn 4:8; Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8-11). God’s holiness means that he transcends his creation; he is the Creator (Gen 1:1; Isa 40:28, 42:5). That is why God alone is to be worshiped. Prayer should begin by worshiping and praising God.

Another meaning of God’s holiness is perfection (Mt 5:48). God is without blemish. That is why he wanted the Israelites to offer sacrifices that are without defect. Jesus, who was sinless, is the perfect sacrifice. We can come to God only through Jesus who made us holy by his blood. Before the holy God, we are mere creatures and sinners. Though he invites us as our Father, we should not be casual or presumptuous, but reverent. When we attend worship service, we should not come casually, but with reverence. If we were to meet the president, surely we would wear our best clothes. How much more should we wear and act our best to meet the holy God. When we realize God is holy, we can also live a holy life--not abusing God’s love.

Since man degenerated due to sin, he does not naturally glorify God or thank God (Ro 1:21). His thinking is futile and his foolish heart is dark. He exchanges God’s glory for idols of all kinds. He abuses his body in sexual immorality. Sadly, we live in this kind of social milieu. Yet God wants us to glorify him and honor his name. Wherever we are, whatever we do--at home, in the office at our computer, studying at school or traveling--we must do it all for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Then we are right with God and in harmony with creation. This makes us happy, like fish in the water.

Third, “your kingdom come” (10). The ultimate hope of believers is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not a geographical territory, but God’s reign. The Bible can be summarized in two phrases: “Paradise Lost,” and “Paradise Restored.” In the beginning, God placed man in a perfect paradise, the Garden of Eden. But through disobedience to God’s command, man lost this paradise. When man abandoned God, Satan entered in and began to rule us as our king. This is the root source of all kinds of miseries: violence and wickedness, depression, despair, and so on, and ultimately eternal punishment. God had mercy on us and sent his one and only Son Jesus to rescue us from the dominion of darkness and to bring us back to his kingdom, the kingdom of love and light (Col 1:13,14). **“Your kingdom**

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come,” means “may God reign over us.” “May God reign in our hearts, our families, our community, our nation, and this world.” When God reigns, we have true peace and love, justice and truth in our hearts. Furthermore, relationships are restored; there is harmony between God, man, and nature. We experience this in part now, but the kingdom is ultimately established when Jesus comes again as King of kings. Prayer is sharing God’s longing that his kingdom may come. Our prayer topic, “May God make North America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” expresses God’s heart’s desire.

There are so many ethnic groups, tribes and cultures in the world. But actually, there are just two kinds of people: God’s children, and Satan’s children. There are so many nations--more than 230. But spiritually speaking, there are just two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:12). There is a constant struggle between two forces: good and evil, justice and injustice, light and darkness, love and hatred. It is a struggle between God’s kingdom and Satan’s kingdom. In this struggle, we are the soldiers of Christ (2 Ti 2:3). We are called to engage in spiritual warfare to extend God’s kingdom, reclaiming it from the devil. This battle pervades every area of existence in this world. Prayer is not a ritual exercise or hobby; it is engaging in holy war.

Verse 10 ends, “**...your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**” In heaven everything is done according to God’s will. This is not yet true on earth. The pride and rebellion of Satan, and of sinful men, seek to thwart God’s will. The Bible tells us that God’s will is good, pleasing and perfect (Ro 12:2). But it requires his children to deny themselves and to sacrifice. Jesus showed us the example when he prayed, “**Yet not as I will, but as you will**” in Gethsemane (Mt 26:39b). Prayer is to submit our will to God’s perfect will. In this first part, we have learned God-centered prayer. Let’s practice it!

II. Prayer for our needs (11-15)

In this second part, Jesus teaches us to pray for our needs. We have both physical and spiritual needs, and we should pray specifically for both. **First, “Give us today our daily bread” (11).** Man is both body and soul. We should not ignore our bodies. In order to maintain our bodies, we need bread. Here “bread” represents our basic physical needs, such as those for

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food, clothes, shelter, transportation, and so on. God knows that we have these needs, and he wants us to ask him to meet them.

Jesus taught us to ask for “daily” bread, not “bi-monthly” or “yearly” bread. Why? When we have plenty of bread, we easily become proud. At the same time, not having enough bread is also a problem for us. Proverbs 30:8-9 says, **“Give me neither poverty, nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.”** God trained Israel in the wilderness to help them depend on him daily for food. The book of Deuteronomy repeatedly warns not to forget God in the land flowing with milk and honey. We must remember every day that God is our Provider. Some people claim that they earned their daily bread through hard work. But if God did not give us air, water, health, wisdom and strength, we could do nothing. In truth, everything comes from God and through God and is to be used for the glory of God (Ro 11:36).

Jesus did not tell us to ask for **“my” daily bread, but for “our” daily bread.** This teaches us that we should overcome our selfishness and be mindful of others. If we are selfish, our life will be miserable. There is an interesting story about the difference between heaven and hell. In the story, both places have piles of food. But it can be eaten only with spoons that have very long handles. Selfish people try to feed only themselves, fail and die of starvation. But those who are mindful of others put the food in others’ mouths. We should be mindful of those with material needs, including our unemployed, and those starving in North Korea, and many African countries.

Second, “Forgive us our debts” (12,14-15). Look at verse 12. **“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”** Here “debts” means our sins (14-15; Col 2:13b,14). As we need bread for our physical lives, so we need forgiveness of sins for our spiritual lives. Of course, at the moment we believe in Jesus, our sins are forgiven and we become children of God (Jn 5:24). But we still need daily forgiveness. It is because we sin every day, intentionally and unintentionally. Sin breaks our fellowship with God. Sin enslaves us and ruins our lives. Jesus wants us to dwell in the presence of God and to be fruitful as we live in this world. The only way to get out of sin’s power is to receive forgiveness from God. God has mercy on those who come to him. 1 John 1:9 says, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all**

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unrighteousness.” Then we can have peace in our hearts, through a right relationship with God.

Verse 12b says, “**...as we also have forgiven our debtors.**” Here Jesus assumes that as we ask for God’s forgiveness we are practicing forgiveness toward those who have sinned against us. Jesus is very serious about this. He said in verses 14-15: “**For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.**” Man’s great problem is that we do not forgive others. People would rather break relationships than forgive others. This is the main reason why there are so many broken relationships: between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and between fellow Christians. Of course, it is natural to hold a grudge against one who hurt us. However, grudges harm the person who holds them most. We need to forgive others for the sake of our own mental and emotional health. Still, this requires struggle. We cannot forgive others with our own strength. One very mature Christian woman knows that she should forgive someone who spoke harshly to her. So she tries. But when she remembers the harsh words, she gets upset with feelings of anger and hatred. Some people say, “Forgive others, but never forget what they did.” This is not real forgiveness. True forgiveness is to forget the wrong completely, and only remember the good things others have done.

To help us forgive others, Jesus told us the parable of the unmerciful servant (Mt 18:21-35). Peter asked Jesus with a generous mind, “**Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?**” Maybe he was trying to get praise from Jesus. However, Jesus answered, “**I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.**” Then Jesus told the parable. There was a man who owed the king 10,000 talents, which is equivalent to 200,000 years’ wages for an ordinary worker. In our time it would be about \$7,300,000,000. To repay the debt, the king ordered that the man, his wife and children, and all that he had be sold. Then the servant fell on his knees and begged for mercy. The king took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go. But when the servant went out, he found a fellow servant who owed him 100 silver coins, which is about \$10,000. He grabbed the man, began to choke him, and said, “**Pay back what you owe me.**” His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged for mercy. But the man refused. Instead, he had the man thrown into prison. When the king heard this, he rebuked the unmerciful servant, reinstated his debt, and made him go to prison until it was fully repaid. Jesus said, “**This is**

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how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” If we hold a grudge in our hearts, we are like the man in this parable. Jesus seriously warns us to forgive others. Though it is not easy, it must be done; we must forgive others--it is non-negotiable.

Third, “Lead us not into temptation” (13). The world we live in is full of evil. Our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour (1 Pe 5:8). He is much stronger and smarter than we are. We cannot overcome his temptation with our own strength. So Jesus taught us to pray. When we acknowledge our weakness before God, and ask his help, he enables us to overcome temptations and live a victorious life.

According to the footnote, the Lord's Prayer ends with, **“...for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”** The Lord's Prayer starts **“hallowed be your [God's] name,”** and ends by declaring God's glory. The Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray and live with a deep desire to glorify God. It teaches us to pray and live according to God's will. As we practice the Lord's Prayer genuinely, we can grow in God's image. May the Lord's Prayer be the principle in our personal lives, families, community, and nation.