

BECOMING IN PRAYER

Jesus' Prayer

This discussion complements the January 22 sermon on “Jesus' Prayer” and we recommend that sermon as a starting point.

Read Together

At its core, prayer is communion with God that forms us into a people who are continually aware of His presence. Author and pastor Richard Foster writes, “In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God’s thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills. Progressively, we are taught to see things from his point of view.”

Jesus Himself showed us clearly what a life of dependence in prayer looks like. If we are to become like Him, we must commit to the same practices and habits He pursued. Luke tells us that “Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” (Luke 5:16, see also Matt. 14:23; Mk. 1:35, 6:46; Luke 9:18;) Indeed, it was not uncommon for Him to spend a whole night in prayer with His Father (Luke 6:12). Even as He approached His own death, He prayed feverishly into the night, submitting His will to the will of His Father (Matt. 26:36-46). It's clear that Jesus Himself lived in constant dependence on the Spirit of God and in submission to the will of His Father through prayer. Why would we need to do anything less?

Jesus not only modeled a life of dependent prayer, but He also taught His disciples how to pray. If we're to learn how to yield our whole selves to God and pray with trust and expectation, this is where we need to start.

In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus says:

Pray then like this:

“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 lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.”

In this simple eight-line prayer, Jesus gives us an example and template for dependent prayer. (You might be wondering where the last line, “For thine is the kingdom...” is, especially if you grew up reciting this prayer. While it is a great line and is a true statement, it is most likely not part of the original prayer Jesus prayed, but was added to this prayer by others in later centuries.) Now, let’s go through each section to better understand how to pray in this way.

Our Father in heaven

Prayer is both communal and conversational because it all starts with a relationship. By praying “our,” Jesus includes his disciples, and us, in being able to call God “Father.” We approach prayer knowing that we are coming to our Father; our “Abba” who loves us deeply and knows us better than we know ourselves. And like any father, He loves to give His children good gifts (Matt. 7:11). We are invited to enter prayer remembering that we are loved sons and daughters of God, not because we have earned the right, but because of what Jesus has done for us. Start prayer resting in your secure place as a son or daughter of God.

Hallowed be your name

Prayer is also captivating. Another way of saying “Hallowed be your name” is: “Let your name be set apart.” Essentially we are asking for God’s name to captivate us above all else. We ask God to set His name apart in our own hearts, in our lives, in our budgets, in our time, in our relationships, in our work, in our play, in our church, in our city, and in our world. Rather than starting with our needs, we focus our hearts and minds on God’s purposes; to restore His broken world to worship Him.

Your kingdom come

Prayer is also causational. When we pray, God uses our prayer to accomplish the work of His kingdom. In prayer, we ask that He reign as King over all. We pray this, recognizing that things will only be good and right in this world when God rules as King over all. Jesus came to restore the kingdom of God. Through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension, He has defeated the great enemies; sin, Satan, and death; and now already rules as King. One day, He will return and defeat Death once and for all, ruling over all things and bringing God’s kingdom to complete restoration (1 Cor. 15:28). We pray for God to do this work! We pray for Jesus to reign over every area of our life and look forward to the day when He will reign over the entire universe. Robert Mulholland writes, “When we pray ‘Let your kingdom come,’ we aren’t asking God to bring history to an end and whisk us to realms of glory, or to wave a magic wand and solve all the problems we face in our life. Rather, we are making a radical commitment to live our life in the world (‘on earth’) in such loving abandonment to God that the values and principles, the perspectives and dynamics of God’s realm of life and wholeness become incarnate in and through our being and doing.”

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

In prayer, we must always begin by yielding our will and relinquishing our whole selves to God. This doesn’t mean that we cease to have desires or longings, but that we bring them open-handed to God and ask that His will be done. Through this prayer, we ask God to align

our will and our desires with God's. Then, we begin to pray bold prayers, expecting that God will answer and work through our prayers to accomplish His will through them.

Give us this day our daily bread

God cares about our lives and physical needs, even mundane things like the bread we eat. We now bring specific requests to Him, asking for His provision. He is not annoyed by our needs or burdened by our requests. He already knows what we need even before we ask, but loves for His sons and daughters to come asking for His help. In this, we recognize that even our most basic needs are completely dependent on His provision.

Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors

Prayer is also confessional. We don't just share our physical need, but we confess our spiritual need. We ask God to forgive us for our sins and consequently be able to forgive those who have sinned against us. This is an opportunity to once again confess our sins to God in specific ways and trust His forgiveness extended to us because of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

Lead us not into temptation

We also know that we will continue to face temptation as long as we live in this broken world. So, we continually need to pray for the Father's help as we face the temptation to believe lies and turn away from Him. Pray for the specific ways you are most often tempted, asking God to help you reject the lies you're tempted to believe in that temptation.

But deliver us from evil

Last, we must pray for protection and deliverance from evil and the Evil One. Paul tells us to be alert because Satan is prowling around like a lion seeking to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8). When we pray for the Father to deliver us from evil, we are praying that He will protect us from the lies of the Deceiver and the shame that the Accuser tries to put on us. We can pray with confidence knowing that Jesus has defeated evil, having disarmed the evil powers of this world (Colossians 2:15) through His death and resurrection.

Community Discussion Questions

1. How do you normally approach prayer? Is it something you look forward to? Dread? Why do you think that is?
2. Jesus starts His prayer with "Our Father." How does that change the posture of our prayer?
3. Before praying for requests like "daily bread," Jesus prays "Hallowed be your name, Let your kingdom come, your will be done..." Why do you think He starts there before getting to requests for specific needs?
4. When we come to our Father in prayer like this, we're giving up control. We're yielding our wills to His good will. What about that is hard for you? What needs, hopes, desires, or dreams are hardest for you to yield to Him? Why do you think that is?
5. Which part of Jesus' prayer is hardest for you to pray? Which is easiest? Why do you think that is? What might that say about how you view "our Father"?
6. *Take time to review the coming "individual practice" together.*

At-Home Individual Practice

In this exercise, we will use the Lord's Prayer Jesus modeled with His disciples as a guide for our own prayers. Start by setting aside 15-30 minutes in a space free of distraction. Put your phone in airplane mode (or off) and set a timer.

Breathe in slowly and then exhale, remembering that God is inviting you to be with Him and to hear from Him in this moment.

Read Jesus' prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 slowly and out loud:

"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 lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil."

Begin to pray slowly through each part of Jesus' prayer, stopping to personalize each part, following the prompts below.

Our Father in heaven

Remember your place before God as His son or daughter. Rest in this relationship.

Hallowed be your name

Ask for God's name to be worshipped above all else in your heart, your life, and this world.

Your kingdom come

Ask that God would reign as King in your heart, in your life, in your family, in your relationships, and in this world. What would this look like? Be specific if you can.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Yield your whole self and your will to God's will. Knowing that His way is always good, ask that His will be done in every area of your life and that your will and your desires be aligned with His.

Give us this day our daily bread

After focusing on the Father's purposes and aligning your will to His will, ask for His provision in your life. Be specific and bring requests burdening you to Him, knowing He cares.

Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors

Confess your sin to the Father, thanking Him that you are forgiven because of Jesus. Be specific. Ask for His strength to forgive others who have hurt you.

Lead us not into temptation

Ask the Father to help you turn away from temptation. Be specific, asking Him to provide a way of escape in the ways you are most often tempted?

But deliver us from evil

Ask for the Father's protection from the Evil One who seeks to destroy and devour. Pray, knowing that God is stronger than the Evil One.