



THE LORD'S PRAYER

WEEK 1
09.03.17

FOCUS VERSES

Matthew 6:6

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 6:5-15

5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

13 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.

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.



FOCUS THOUGHT

Jesus gave His disciples instructions regarding prayer that are important for us as Christians to follow in our devotion to Him.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Method Living

In the 1920s the techniques of method acting were introduced to America. Method acting is intended to help actors achieve better characterization of the parts they play. However, some method actors have been known to take this to extremes. Daniel Day-Lewis built his own colonial house using only the tools available in the seventeenth century and lived without running water or electricity to get ready to play a particular role. For his role as a taxi driver, Robert De Niro obtained his cabbie license and worked twelve-hour shifts in New York City. Billy Bob Thornton placed

crushed glass in his shoes to get a distinctive walk. Nicolas Cage had a few teeth removed without anesthetic to experience the pain, and went everywhere with his face wrapped in bandages for five weeks.

To some extent we are all actors learning our parts as we portray ourselves to the world. However, God's method is an actual transformation of the heart. In His presence we can quit playing a role and embrace a new reality. Instead of method acting, we are called to method living.

OUTLINE

I. UNLIKE THE HYPOCRITES

- A. They Want Others to See Them
- B. They Have Their Reward

II. UNLIKE THE HEATHEN

- A. We Are to Avoid Vain Repetitions
- B. God Knows Our Needs Before We Ask

III. THE LORD'S PRAYER—THE MODEL

- A. Recognition
- B. Praise
- C. Submission
- D. Petition
- E. Forgiveness
- F. Direction
- G. Worship

IV. THE BELIEVER

- A. We Are to Pray in Secret
- B. God Will Reward Us Openly

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught about prayer to the masses of Galilean Jews, to whom daily prayer was a requirement of the Law (Matthew 6:5–15). After His disciples observed Him praying, one of them was moved to ask Jesus, “Lord, teach

us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Jesus responded with the words “when ye pray” (Luke 11:2). This phrase is significant in two ways: (1) He did not begin with a discussion of why His listeners should pray or a command urging them to pray; He simply understood that they would pray; (2) these instructions concerning proper prayer do not apply only in special circumstances or for specific types of prayer; they apply whenever we are praying.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Although occurring under different circumstances and with different audiences, the two lessons Jesus taught about prayer are so similar as to be considered two accounts of the same event—the giving of the Lord's Prayer. The lesson on prayer found in Luke was to committed disciples who desired to offer Christlike prayers; that in Matthew was to curious Jews who, for the most part, knew prayer only as a traditional fulfillment of a religious obligation. Given this difference, it is not surprising that the lesson in Matthew begins with corrections to the corruptions in prayer brought about by Jewish traditions (“thou shalt not”), while the lesson in Luke begins simply, “say.”

I. UNLIKE THE HYPOCRITES

In the Matthew passage, Jesus began His lesson on prayer by recognizing that prayer can be more about the one doing the praying than the one to whom the prayer is allegedly offered. “Thou shalt not be as the hypocrites,” He warned. The word from which hypocrite is translated literally means one who plays a role on stage. An actor works diligently to adopt the speech, mannerisms, and projected attitude of the character portrayed. So the religious counterfeit must be skillful in Christianity in order to imitate it believably. Thus, a convincing hypocrite can (at least temporarily) actually do right, but for the wrong reason.

Some use the existence of hypocrites as a reason for being hypocritical (like burning all one’s currency because someone discovered a counterfeit). But hypocrites really do harm only to themselves. The authors of *The School of Biblical Evangelism* wrote, “The hypocrite is like a man in a plane who pretends to be wearing a parachute when he’s not. When he jumps, who do you think will be the big loser? Him, or the other passengers who have their parachutes on?” (Kirk Cameron and Ray Comfort). The prayers of a hypocrite are a make-believe parachute.

A. They Want Others to See Them

The problem with the hypocrites is not that “they love to pray” or even that they pray “standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets.” Jesus was not teaching us to be ashamed of praying, to stay seated when we pray at church, or never to participate in public prayer. Rather He was condemning those whose motivation for prayer was “that they may be seen of men” rather than that they may be heard of God.

Some take Jesus’ words to “enter into thy closet . . . shut thy door” and pray in secret as the normative form of all Christian prayer. Instead, with these words Jesus was contrasting the humble attitude of the sincere Christian with the arrogant self-aggrandizement of the hypocrite. He was emphasizing that our purpose in prayer is not to impress others.

Obviously, if hypocrites prayed only to be seen of men, they would have no secret prayer life. Lest our prayer life become hypocritical, Jesus warned us to keep our private

prayers private and keep all our prayers directed toward Him.

B. They Have Their Reward

Jesus admitted hypocrites “have their reward” (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16) but contrasts their reward from men with the far greater reward from the Father. The positive reaction of the audience is a great reward for an actor. So it is that the hypocrite relies on onlookers for purpose and meaning. True Christians have a purpose not bound up in what others think of them but in their relationship with their Father.

Three times within the space of a few verses Jesus said, “Thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” This was in reference to charitable giving (Matthew 6:4), private prayer (verse 6), and fasting (verse 18). Giving, prayer, and fasting were the three great pillars upon which the Jewish life was to be based. All three are important manifestations of the Christian life, but they are easy for the hypocrite to imitate, and they lend themselves readily to wrong motivations.

II. UNLIKE THE HEATHEN

The phrase “vain repetitions” (Matthew 6:7) is translated from a single compound word that is used nowhere else in the New Testament and is rare in non-Christian literature. As a result, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact meaning between two possibilities: (1) to stammer or speak incoherently or (2) to say the same thing over and over. Either way, Jesus refined His use of the word by pairing it with “much speaking.”

It is common for pagans to pray by monotonously uttering meaningless sounds, repeating a single phrase over and over, or reciting flowery, formalized prayers. According to I Kings 18:26 the priests of Baal prayed, “Baal, hear us” from morning until noon. For two hours the Ephesian pagans cried out, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” (Acts 19:34). Often the heathen believed that their gods had to be placated so they would not punish, bribed with inducements and accolades so they would bless, and persuaded to change their will to provide the petitioner’s needs. The first impact of the admonition not to pray like the heathen is to keep our prayers simple and meaningful, refraining from

over-flowery prose and pompous verbosity which cannot impress God and may stand in the way of true and intimate communication.

A. We Are to Avoid Vain Repetitions

The problem with prayers full of “vain repetitions” is that they come from a heart that does not understand the character of God and the purpose of prayer. It does not violate Jesus’ instructions to repeat portions of prayers, or even to occasionally recite entire prayers as long as in doing so prayer does not become empty words attempting to impress.

Jesus was criticizing the belief that long repetitive prayers were needed to get God’s attention. “They think they shall be heard for their much speaking,” Jesus said, thus raising the question: “Why do you think you shall be heard?” Jesus’ answer to that implied question was “for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.” We know our prayers will be heard because God is our Father, and He knows and cares about our needs even before we pray.

B. God Knows Our Needs Before We Ask

If we misunderstand prayer as only for the purpose of receiving our needs, the fact that God is our Father and He knows what we need before we ask seems sufficient to argue that we do not need to pray. If He knows we have a genuine need and yet He fails to provide for that need until we ask Him, it seems He is being an abusive father. This is especially true when He understands that “we know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Romans 8:26).

Out of context, James 4:2 “ye have not, because ye ask not” then seems like a bludgeon to get us to perform the unpleasant duty of prayer. On the other hand, if we venture to ask for those things we think we need, it seems we run the risk that He will provide things that are actually harmful for us because we asked for them so persistently. But if He is loving enough to give us good things even when we do not pray for them, and gracious enough not to give us harmful things even when we do pray for them, then some individuals might think it does not matter whether we pray.

These are the ways unbelievers think of prayer. Jesus gave a model prayer through which we can rid ourselves of such misconceptions while we delve into the depths of the relationship established and nurtured by true prayer.

III. THE LORD’S PRAYER—THE MODEL

In both Matthew and Luke, the Lord’s Prayer begins with the command, “When you pray, say” which naturally leads to the idea that we are to recite this prayer. However, while “say” may refer to the actual words of a direct discourse, it primarily refers simply to the act of verbal communication. That is, Jesus is providing a model or pattern by which we may order our communication to God. When using this pattern, we express in our own words genuine communication with the Lord God.

A. Recognition

The first words of the model prayer are “Our Father which art in heaven.” For the Jewish hearers this must have been a startling way to begin a prayer. “Father” was used in reference to God only fifteen times in the Old Testament, and nowhere in the prayers recorded in the Old Testament do we find God addressed as Father. Herbert Lockyear (*All the Divine Names and Titles in the Bible*) noted that references to God’s fatherhood in the Old Testament were “merely figurative, and used by way of illustration” with the single exception of Isaiah 9:6 where the promised Messiah was called “the everlasting Father.”

Jesus taught His hearers to address God not only as a Father, but as our Father. The beginning of the prayer acknowledges a relationship startlingly intimate. For this reason, of the more than 165 times in the Gospels Jesus uses “Father” in reference to God, He is almost always teaching His disciples. In this we see that believers uniquely have the right and privilege to address God as our Father. We can scarcely overstate the wonder of the invitation being presented to the Jewish multitude when in Matthew 6:9 they are instructed to pray to “Our Father.”

B. Praise

The Lord’s Prayer begins with three “thy” petitions related to God followed by three

“us” petitions related to our needs. The first “thy” petition is “Hallowed be thy name.” That this is a petition and not a statement of praise such as “thy name is glorious” is clear from the grammar.

For God’s name to be hallowed (or glorified), He must receive the praise and honor He deserves. For petitioners to request that this be accomplished, they must first recognize the divine prerogative of exaltation and then desire Him to work all things together to His ultimate glory. Whatever we do in word or in deed is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus (Colossians 3:17). All our prayers should glorify His name. According to John MacArthur, “Prayer begins and ends not with the needs of man but with the glory of God. It should be concerned primarily with who God is, what He wants, and how He can be glorified” (*Alone with God*). E. M. Bounds wrote, “Prayer honors God; it dishonors self” (*Purpose in Prayer*). The first and governing petitions of the Lord’s Prayer form a recognition that our prayers must be balanced between God’s glory and our needs, with the emphasis always on God.

C. Submission

The second “thy” petition of the prayer connects with and helps explain the first. When the believer prays “Thy kingdom come,” there is a recognition of God’s plan and ultimate goal for creation. Only when His kingdom comes will His name be hallowed as it deserves. His name is not hallowed when we attempt to bring our own kingdom, secure our own good, and fulfill our own lusts.

The third “thy” petition, “Thy will be done,” further emphasizes the submission of the petitioners to the will of God in all matters, both in Heaven and in earth. God’s will is perfect and His plan is perfect. He loves us with an everlasting love and desires only good for us. As humans, we are usually oriented toward short-term benefits. Without the help of the Spirit, we are not very good at judging what is good for us (Romans 8:26). However, by sincerely asking God’s will to be done, we petition God to ignore our requests for those things that would not be for our good.

An important part of becoming Christlike is learning to adopt God’s will as our will. We

may see prayer as a chance to bend God’s will to ours. “As a result, we tend to perceive prayer as important only for making a difference in our circumstances rather than for the difference it can make in us and for God’s glory. . . . When He draws you into conformity to His blessed person and will, your circumstances, no matter how insurmountable they may have appeared at first, will no longer be your priority” (*Alone with God*).

D. Petition

The three “thy” petitions are followed by three “us” petitions, starting with a prayer for daily bread. Daily bread refers to those things necessary for living and includes food, shelter, health, and so forth. They are considered daily in that without a continuous and sufficient supply, our comfort and survival are threatened. In addition to these material needs, people also have social, spiritual, and psychological needs that must be met on an ongoing basis. These, too, broadly fit the category of “daily bread.”

It is human nature to desire a reserve upon which we may draw to meet our daily needs. But even if we were to become rich in these things, riches are ultimately deceitful in their promises of security (Matthew 13:22). Therefore, Jesus continued His teaching by saying, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:19–21). This petition recognizes God as the benefactor from which all these goods derive (James 1:17), and God becomes our unlimited reservoir and security. He is our inexhaustible treasure.

In the Matthew account the petition is for daily bread to be provided “this day” while in Luke it is a continuous provision “day by day.” God extends His loving kindness to meet the needs of anyone who sincerely petitions Him, but there is a special relationship of continuous provision available for His disciples.

E. Forgiveness

The second of the three “us” petitions deals with the universal human need for forgiveness. Like the “daily bread” of the previous petition, a continuous and sufficient supply of forgiveness is essential for continued human comfort and survival. However, the lack of daily bread threatens the temporal man while the lack of forgiveness threatens both the temporal and immortal man.

The specific petition to the multitude in Matthew was “forgive us our debts” while to the disciples in Luke it was “forgive us our sins.” The word translated “debts” means that which is strictly due as obligations. Debts include any offenses or trespasses that require reparation. This would include moral transgressions (Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*). Jesus was directing the multitude to their experiential wrongness with others, which included their inability to keep the righteous deeds of the Law (Romans 3:20; Galatians 5:3).

The word translated “sins” is more specifically acts of wrongdoing or the state of being in transgression against God. To the disciples, Jesus emphasized their existential wrongness with God. Believers are not yet perfect (Philippians 3:12). In this life we “groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23).

We are all debtors, accumulating offenses against God and man. The Lord’s Prayer directs our pleas for forgiveness to God. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). However, the passage in Matthew adds “as we forgive our debtors” and Luke has “for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.” The phrase “as we” shows that God’s forgiveness for us is proportionate to our own for others, while “for we” shows that His forgiveness is conditioned on our attitude of forgiveness toward others. “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14–15).

The verb “forgive” in both “as we forgive” (Matthew 6:12) and “if ye forgive” (Matthew

6:14) is translated in the present tense, which may be misunderstood as a habit or process of forgiving. Instead, the verb form should be understood as “have forgiven.” That is, petitioners are to approach God for forgiveness only after forgiving those who have wronged them (Mark 11:25–26). In addition, if they had become a debtor to a brother, they were to be reconciled to that brother before offering a sacrifice to God (Matthew 5:23–24). In contrast, “forgive” in the phrase “for we also forgive” (Luke 11:4) is translated from a present tense verb. Disciples are to continuously forgive everyone who is wronging them. For disciples, forgiveness is a habit of life coming from the process of Christian growth.

Forgiveness is not just a state of mind or emotion. The word *forgive* is translated from a word which literally means “send away.” To forgive a wrong is to dismiss it from further notice, let it go, and release it from your power. If you forgive, you relinquish any claim you may rightfully have for reparation or reprisal. When we forgive our debtors, the debt continues unpaid but is no longer the responsibility of the debtor. However, when God forgives, He not only relinquishes His right to the just payment for our debts but pays those debts Himself.

F. Direction

The third and final “us” petition is expressed in the negative: “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” In this phrase in the original language, “evil” is not a noun but an adjective that has the definite article “the” in front of it: “the evil one.” This calls to mind Matthew 4:1: “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.” The word translated here as “temptation” is often used in the New Testament to refer to any kind of trial or struggle in life.

Throughout Scripture we see that God often uses trials to help His people grow in Him. Overcoming temptations, passing through trials, and enduring tribulations are vital to our growth in Christ. It would be in direct contradiction to the previous petition “thy will be done” if the petitioners were to pray, “Keep us from going through bad times.” Instead, this petition invokes the guidance and protection

promised in I Corinthians 10:13: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

G. Worship

The Matthew account closes with an expression of worship missing from Luke. “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.” Such worship forms an appropriate conclusion to prayer, bringing the petitioners’ minds back to the opening of the prayer and the three “thy” petitions.

IV. THE BELIEVER

A. We Are to Pray in Secret

With the exception of verse 6, the entire passage in Matthew 6:5–13 containing Jesus’ teaching concerns corporate prayer. Such phrases such as “give us this day our daily bread” speak of the interconnectedness of believers and the concern we are to have for one another’s needs.

As believers we often join together as a corporate body in prayer. We should also be ready to lead other Christians in prayer or, when appropriate, offer prayers before our communities. However, we should never allow public prayers to become the extent of our prayer lives. Jesus modeled for us a life of prayer in public and in private.

Some people may want to impress others with their prayers rather than keeping them secret. “Sin leads us to take shortcuts in all the Christian disciplines, and when we

succumb to its temptation often enough, hypocrisy becomes the pattern of our lives without our realizing it” (*Alone with God*). But it is in our secret prayers that we often find the most intimate moments with God. We can be unguarded, candid, and unpretentious. In our secret prayers we communicate the hidden things of the heart without concern that others would misunderstand or not approve.

B. God Will Reward Us Openly

In addition to the wondrous blessings obtained through an active prayer life, Jesus promised a public reward for those who pray in secret. This reward no doubt takes many forms, but few who observe a believer’s life will fail to note the evidence of being alone with God. According to William Barclay in *The Daily Study Bible Series*, the rabbis say, “He who prays within his house surrounds it with a wall that is stronger than iron.”

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

The most perfect and beautiful blueprints are of little value unless the building is actually constructed. Jesus’ lessons on prayer in Matthew 6 and Luke 11 can either fall upon deaf ears and hardened hearts or provide the impulse for a glorious expression of prayer. Each of us should allow His words to motivate a vital secret prayer life. Also, because the Lord’s Prayer is in fact a model for corporate prayer, this lesson would not be complete without dedicating class time to join together in bringing our petitions and praise to “Our Father.” ■

REFLECTIONS

- Discuss the common practice of reciting the Lord’s Prayer as part of a worship service. Do you believe such recitation to be valuable, or is it just vain repetition?
- According to the lesson, Jesus’ teachings concerning prayer “apply whenever we are praying.” Does this mean that every prayer must have all of the elements found in the Lord’s Prayer?
- In the Scriptures we studied, Jesus taught almost exclusively about corporate prayer. What place does corporate prayer have in your local congregation? in your home?
- Concerning prayer, J. Oswald Sanders wrote, “No spiritual exercise is such a blending of complexity and simplicity” (*Effective Prayer*). What do you find to be the simplest about prayer? the most complex?