

Introduction:

No series on prayer could be complete without examining the model prayer Jesus presented in the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 6:9-13**). One of the great mistakes made in studying this prayer is to reduce it down to a prayer formula. This prayer is not some magic chant to be incessantly repeated. Rather it is an extremely concentrated example of the essence of proper prayer. Some Christians spend their time discussing whether or not we can say this prayer today. After studying it, my big question is not whether we can say this prayer. My big question is once we grasp the full meaning behind this seemingly simple prayer, will we even want to pray it?

Discussion:

I. "Our Father..."

- A. The term "Father," as used here, is not just the title of the one to whom we address our prayers. It describes the relationship we need to pray. God must be our Father. The word translated "Father" (*pater*) denotes an ancestor. But its scriptural connotation describes one who is the progenitor or source of life. The Father is the one who nourishes and strengthens; who supports and maintains. Finally, the Father is the one who is in authority. What He says goes. Jesus was not using this term to describe our physical relationship with God, but our spiritual one. Only those who have been baptized into Christ, putting on Christ, can be called sons of God through faith in Christ (**Galatians 3:26-27**). Only those who have received spiritual life, who are nourished and sustained spiritually by relying on God as their Father and who are willing to let God run their lives may pray. Are we really willing to rely that heavily on God? Do we really want to pray that prayer?
- B. Interestingly, every time Jesus personally prayed, He either addressed God as "My Father" (**Matthew 26:39**) or simply "Father" (**John 17:1**)? However, when He taught His disciples to pray, He said "Our Father." Please, do not misunderstand; passages such as **Romans 8:15** and **Galatians 4:6** explain we are allowed to address God with the words "My Father." However, Jesus demonstrated something in His teaching. Having a relationship with the Father entails a relationship with His other children. I am well aware there are numerous egregious errors accomplished by organized churches today. However, we cannot throw the baby out with the bathwater. If we do not want a relationship with God's children through His church, we cannot have a relationship with God (*cf.* **I John 4:20**). When we pray this prayer we are acknowledging that we cannot call God "Our Father" if we do not want to be a part of the "Our." Further, notice the continued use of "us" throughout the prayer. Unless we desire all these blessings for all of our brethren just as much as we desire them for ourselves, we cannot pray this prayer.

II. "In heaven."

- A. We are on earth, God is in heaven. What an acknowledgement. God is not one of us. He is separate and different. He is greater. According to **Isaiah 55:8-9**, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways and thoughts higher than ours. When we acknowledge that God is in heaven, we are acknowledging that He does not view things as we naturally do. God is in heaven, therefore, we are not allowed to come to Him however we please. We have to transform our hearts to pray truly (**Romans 12:1-2**). Basically, if the way we pray now is about the same way we would have prayed before we became Christians, then we have not grasped the full impact of our Father's residence in heaven.
- B. God is not limited by our earthly laws (**Psalms 115:1-8**). He is not limited by what limits us. Further, while our prayers may impact God, they do not control Him. Our prayers cannot manipulate Him. When communicating with people on earth, we may be able to hide our real intent from them, but God is in heaven and we can hide nothing from Him.

- C. Finally, **Ecclesiastes 5:1-7** warns us that since God is in heaven we must be careful as we come to Him. Prayer is not a toy. We are not chit-chatting with our neighbor over coffee. We are approaching the throne of the majestic God. We must not be rash or hasty in our prayers. Our prayers must be offered with great thought, sincerity, devotion and commitment to our Father who is in heaven or we will find that we are offering the sacrifice of fools. Our Father is in heaven, so we should approach prayer with caution.

III. "Hallowed be Your name."

- A. "Hallowed" means to sanctify or set apart as holy. If we pray this prayer, we are claiming that God's name is to be set apart. God's name is to be extolled. God's name is to be held in high esteem and honored. Further, we understand that the phrase "Your name" is used by figure of speech not to mean the appellation by which God is designated, but to everything God is. He is to be honored, hallowed and set apart in our hearts and minds.
- B. This is more than a trite phrase of praise. This is a mission statement for every disciple. Jesus said in **John 15:8**, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." We are only Christ's disciples and, thereby children of God, if we are bearing fruit that glorifies God. While we certainly recognize we could not really pray this prayer if we use the Lord's name vainly throughout the day, we must recognize that we can only pray this prayer if our entire life is about glorifying Him and not ourselves. **Psalms 115:1** says, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory." Who do we really want glorified?

IV. "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

- A. Regrettably, many Christians get snagged on the phrase, "Your kingdom come." Certainly, if Jesus was modeling a prayer for the start of God's kingdom on earth, I believe we could not make this same statement. The kingdom has already begun (**Colossians 1:13**). However, I believe the statement, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," is Jesus' explanation of what He meant by "Your kingdom come." He was not teaching the disciples to strictly ask God to start His kingdom. Rather, He was teaching us to pray that God's kingdom permeate the earth as it does heaven. **Luke 17:20-21** explained that God's kingdom is within us. The territory of God's kingdom is not land and nations, but the hearts of men. When we are praying this prayer as Jesus intended it, we are praying that God's reign spread through the hearts of men on earth, just as it has complete rule of the hearts of the heavenly hosts.
- B. That being said, what are we praying if we actually mean for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done on earth exactly as it is in heaven? We are praying for God to have complete control down here. Where should the answer to such a prayer begin? **Matthew 6:33** says we should seek God's kingdom and righteousness first. When we really pray this prayer, we are saying we are no longer concerned about our will, we want to lose ourselves in God's will, we will no longer run our lives but let God run them. We are saying we are willing to live as Paul in **Galatians 2:20**, crucifying ourselves with Christ and letting Him live through us. How can we pray this prayer if we have not yet sacrificed our lives, our families and our pursuits to serve God completely and wholly? This is the foundation for effective praying. Praying this prayer is not about bending God to accomplish our will, but about aligning ourselves to accomplish His.
- C. Further, this prayer is not just about us, but the whole world. If we really mean this prayer, we are saying we want God's will to rule in the hearts of everyone on earth. If we really meant that, wouldn't we be doing something about getting the gospel of the kingdom out to others (cf. **Matthew 4:23; 9:35**)?
- D. Do you see that praying this prayer is not about getting God to do something? It is about us committing ourselves to do something. Praying this prayer means our lives are bound up in serving God and helping others serve God as well. How many of us really want our lives bound up in that? How many of us really want to pray this prayer?

V. "Give us this day our daily bread."

- A. This prayer is more than a passing request for our physical needs. In this prayer, we acknowledge our physical needs can only be fulfilled by God. Yet, it goes deeper. As we rely on Him, we are saying all we want is what God feels is all we need. This is really an abbreviated form of the

plea of Agur, the son of Jakeh, in **Proverbs 30:8-9**. “Give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny You, and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.” What an amazing prayer. Most of us would pray that God not keep us poor, but how many of us would do it out of concern for God’s name? Remember, we are supposed to hallow God’s name, not profane it. At the other end of the spectrum, how many of us would ever be so concerned that material things might turn us from the Lord that we specifically prayed, “Lord, please don’t give me too much.”? How many of us could say that we had a concept of what receiving too much would be? That is exactly what this prayer means. “Father, I am content with receiving only what I need.” Consider **I Timothy 6:8** in this context. Could any of us really be content with only what we need for today?

- B. Further, notice that this prayer is not just for “me.” We are not praying, “Give me this day my daily bread,” but, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Our prayers are not just to be for ourselves but for our brethren as well. With this prayer in mind, look at **James 2:15-16**. When we pray for God to feed and clothe our destitute brethren, we must be a part of the answer by giving them from our own stores. This corresponds with **I Timothy 6:17-19**. Do you realize what this means? If we pray this prayer, we are agreeing to help provide for others when God has blessed us with more than enough for ourselves. What a prayer.

VI. “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

- A. In addition to praying for physical needs, Jesus teaches us to pray for spiritual needs. We need to pray for forgiveness. Certainly we can only pray this prayer when we recognize that we have sinned. For some of us, that seems obvious. But do not forget the Pharisee of **Luke 18:11-12**. He did not seem to recognize his sin.
- B. Interestingly, Jesus did not say, “Forgive us our sins.” He said, “Forgive us our debts.” This prayer does not acknowledge a mistake in judgment. It does not acknowledge a character flaw. It does not acknowledge that I am only human. It acknowledges that I owe God. Further, it acknowledges that despite my real debt, I cannot pay what I owe. I need mercy, grace and forgiveness. This prayer acknowledges that I am asking for something I know I do not deserve. Therefore, I cannot demand it. I could not be upset if God refused. Further, when God, as He has promised forgives (**I John 1:9**), I cannot become arrogant about it. We do not suddenly become worthy or better than anyone else just because God is merciful to us.
- C. This prayer comes with a qualification. “Forgive me my debts the same way I forgive those who owe me.” This point was so important Jesus reiterated it after He concluded His prayer in **Matthew 6:14-15**. According to **Luke 6:37-38**, this is how our forgiveness will be meted to us. To receive mercy, we must be merciful. We need to be extremely honest here. Do we really want God to deal with our sins against Him, the way we have dealt with others’ sins against us? Again we ask, how many of us really want to pray this prayer?

VII. “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

- A. This statement is by far the most difficult for me. The word translated “temptation” is used in various ways throughout scripture. It can refer to temptation in the sense of trying to get us to sin. It can refer to testing to prove us faithful. It can be used to describe hardships and trials. Take your pick of these options and questions abound. If I consider God actively leading me to sin because of temptation, I remember **James 1:13-14**. I must never even suggest that God tempts me. If I consider a testing to prove my faith, I remember **I Peter 1:6-7**. This kind of testing refines me and helps me rejoice in Jesus. If I consider hardships and trials, I remember **James 1:2**. Instead of praying not to have these hardships I am supposed to count them all joy because they produce patience and patience produces maturity. What was Jesus teaching? In all honesty, I am still not sure that I have a complete grasp of the depth of this prayer. In fact, I am pretty sure I do not have a complete grasp. However, there are numerous passages that correspond with and shed light on Jesus’ teaching.
- B. Consider two psalms that make similar statements—**Psalms 119:33-40** and **Psalms 141:3-10**. In the context of these psalms, we see a picture that says, “God, left to myself, I know I am going to fail. Please lead me so that I do not fall prey to the traps laid by the evil one. Help me understand Your word. Have Your children rebuke me when I am falling. Do whatever it takes, but

keep me from destroying myself.” Whether evil one refers specifically to the devil or to a person through whom the devil may be working to get us to sin is really immaterial. Here is the heart of this prayer. Many of us intellectually know we should refrain from sin and evil. None of us want to experience what we know is the ultimate end of the snares laid by the evil one. But even with that, we still try to follow the lead of our own desires. In that scenario, we will fail. The only way to escape temptation and be delivered from the evil one is to let God lead us, which calls to mind another psalm—**Psalm 23**. Remember, with every temptation, God provides the way of escape (**I Corinthians 10:13**). However, to take it, we have to give up leading ourselves and let God lead us in His paths of righteousness, which ties back into our prayer that God’s kingdom come and will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

- C. One great aspect of this is the biblical testimony that God knows how to lead us away from temptation and knows how to deliver us from the traps of the evil one and the judgment that comes from his traps (**II Peter 2:5-10**). But notice very carefully who God will deliver from such. He will not deliver just anybody who mouths this prayer. It is not a magic formula for salvation. If we want to pray this prayer and want God to grant it, we must be godly, righteous people who are tormented in our souls over the sins which we see and hear from the wicked. Too many people would rather pray, “Lord, I am going to live however I want, please just take care of me and keep me from sinning too badly.” Too many of us want to defend walking as close to the sin line as possible and then ask God to keep us from actually sinning. However, if we really pray this prayer, we are committing ourselves to be godly people who are tormented by the thought of sin and temptation. We are committing ourselves to stay as far away from the sin line as possible and take the way escape from sin at the earliest possible time. How many of us really want to pray this prayer?

VIII. “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

- A. In all honesty, there is a good reason that many translations do not contain this part of the verse. The earliest manuscripts do not include this statement. The parallel passage in **Luke 11:4** does not include it. It may very well be that this was actually an interpolation added in for some reason by some late scribe. Whether or not that is the case, this statement certainly corresponds with the entire tenor of scriptural teaching on prayer (*cf.* **I Chronicles 29:10-12**). Therefore, we will consider what this statement means for our prayers.
- B. Here we find the basis for every request made throughout the prayer. Why should God’s name be hallowed? Why do we want God’s will to govern the earth? Why do we ask for daily bread, for forgiveness, for leadership and deliverance from God? Because we recognize that God is sovereign. He is the ruler of the universe. In the end, if we go against His rule, trying to follow our own rule, we will be judged. Therefore, we want to submit to His rule. Because we recognize that God is powerful. He can accomplish all that we ask. In fact, if any of these things will be accomplished it will be because God has caused or, at the very least, permitted them to be. Finally, we recognize that glory belongs to God and not to us.

Conclusion:

As I try to boil down what I have learned most from this prayer, I recognize the following. Most of the time we study prayer hoping to learn how to pray the right way in order to get what we want. Regrettably, we too often take a formulaic approach. We believe we can start with a healthy layer of Praise, add the appropriate amount of Confession, pour in a heaping amount of Petition that has been strained of Selfishness and then add Faith until God finally gives us what we want. It does not work this way. However, I have now learned the foolproof way to get everything we want through prayer. To get everything we want through prayer, we must learn to want what God wants for us, for His people and for His world. Then we must pray for those wants. When we become transformed by the renewing of our minds to think the way God thinks, to walk the way God walks and to want what God wants, we will always get what we want through prayer. That is the crux of Jesus’ example prayer.