

# The Lord's Prayer

We all know that Jesus provided this prayer as a model to teach His disciples and us how to pray. And yet so often we simply recite it like some kind of mantra, repeating the words without even thinking at all about what they mean. What did Jesus intend us to learn about prayer from this model in Mt 6:9-15?

## Our Father in heaven

- Right away Jesus makes clear that this prayer is not for everyone—it is a family prayer, a conversation between family members. It is a model of communication between children and their Father, the source of their life.
- And He is not a distant uncaring father. Remember Romans 8:15: we pray to our Abba, our papa, our daddy. So we can begin our prayer with “Daddy in heaven.” That is the intimacy of the relationship where Jesus begins.

## Hallowed be Your name

- Let's get some definitions first. *Hallowed* comes from the word 'holy' and means 'treat as holy.' And *holy* means 'separate, special, not common, not ordinary, set apart.' *Name* in this context means 'person,' as also seen in places like Act 1:15 which says '120 names', meaning persons. Or Rev 3:4 where 'a few names' means persons.
- So Jesus teaches us to pray, *Papa in heaven, may Your name, may You as a person, may You and all You stand for be treated as holy, special, unique, separate from the ordinary things of human life. We could paraphrase this, May You be properly honored and respected and revered as the truly glorious person that You are.*
- But hallowed by whom? The world tramples on God, rejects Him, curses Him, ignores Him, abuses Him, hates Him. But this prayer is not about the world. It is a personal family prayer. So Jesus does not primarily mean May the world at large treat You as holy. He means that when I pray, when **we** as a church pray, we should pray May **we** treat Your name as holy. *Papa, hallowed be Your name in my own life, every day, in every circumstance.*
- Even we Christians can fall into treating God as common, as an ordinary part of our lives, as a part we control and use for ourselves when we wish. Even we Christians can fall into thinking of God as our personal servant whose job is to help us have a good life. The first request of this model prayer is aimed at correcting this kind of thinking. It implies that I am examining myself, my choices, and my behaviors in the light of this glorious person. And then I am talking to God about what I see.
- **This request is aimed at honoring God as my Creator.** *Papa Creator, may I treat You as holy in my own life.*

## Your Kingdom come

- We know that God rules as King over His creation and carries out His sovereign will just as He desires. So in a sense, His kingdom does not need to come. It has always been and always will be here. But this is not the sense Jesus has in view.
- Jesus tells us to pray, *Our Daddy in heaven who is King of all, may Your kingship and kingly rule and kingdom grow and prosper in this world. May it grow numerically to more and more people in my city and my church. May it grow geographically from Jerusalem to Judea to my hometown, to the uttermost parts of the world. Most of all, may it grow in me personally, ruling over the innermost reaches of my heart and life.*
- This request is about our agenda. And the King has set our agenda! It is to advance His kingdom in this world, person by person, starting with ourselves. May God's rule as King grow deeper and deeper through every aspect of my life, my church, and every person we touch in this world. May I be a useful instrument in Your kingdom.
- **This request is aimed at following God as my King and Ruler.** *Papa King, may You enjoy full rule over my life.*

## Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

- **This request is aimed at obeying God as my Lord and Master.** Remember, this is primarily a personal family prayer. *Daddy in heaven who is Master of all, may I carry out Your will in my life. You are my Lord and Master giving commands and expressing Your will to me. May I do as You command today and every day in every way, as fully and wholeheartedly as it is done by all the inhabitants of heaven.*
- Do you notice how the focus is narrowing and getting more personal as Jesus proceeds? First in view is God's person, and the glory and respect He deserves from me. Then His rule as King over me. Now His will, His desires, His intentions, His purposes for me as His servant.

- So what is His will? Certainly our holiness-- that our character and behavior match His. And that through my life and my church, people are drawn to know Him and grow closer to Him. That we learn to love in action as He loves and sacrifice ourselves for the good of others just as He did for us. That we grow in the knowledge of His word. That we count others as more important than ourselves and serve them selflessly. You can easily add to this list. These are far more important topics for our prayers than what we usually pray for.

### **Give us this day our daily bread**

- Shocking! This is not at all how we pray! We take today for granted. We pray for His provision and blessing in the future and handle today ourselves. Yet in this model prayer, Jesus tells us to pray for today and for the critical needs we have today. *Papa in heaven, give me today the physical things my body requires to survive today.* Did not God try to teach Israel this very thing when He provided them manna from heaven one day at a time?
- What about tomorrow? Jesus will later say in 6:34, *Do not be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.* And when He says don't worry about tomorrow, what is He talking about? Look at the context, v 25: your life, body, food, drink and clothing. As to our most essential needs to live, Jesus says to focus our prayer on today and let tomorrow take care of itself.
- Think about it. The first three requests, half of the Lord's prayer, are about me aligning myself with who God is and what He is doing. Half of my prayers should be spent talking to God about His glory and His agenda and how my life fits into it. And when I get to my own needs, Jesus tells me to ask God to give me what I need to survive today and let tomorrow take care of itself. And as we pray for these daily things, He also reminds us that we are praying to our Papa in heaven who knows what we need before we ask Him, v 8.
- **This request is aimed at looking to God as my Provider for today.** Let it sink in. It presumes a way of living far different than our way. Our focus should be on today, and on living for Him today. On using the today that we have for His glory in sickness and health, good times and bad, ease and struggle. We can and should pray for God to heal the infirmity of our body today. But let us pray even more earnestly that God would use us for His glory today no matter what our state of health. *Today. Today. Today.* And let the rest take care of itself. So says Jesus.

### **And forgive us our debts as we also forgave our debtors**

- Jesus places this request exactly where we need it. Because once we have heard in our hearts what He is saying in the first four requests, we probably feel an acute need for forgiveness. *Papa, I fall so short of living the way You want me to live and praying the way You want me to pray. Papa in heaven, forgive me my debts.*
- Why debts? Remember the first words of this prayer, our Father. I am a family member. I am accepted and loved by my Father in heaven. My sins have been paid for, wiped out, nailed to the cross. I am a child of God. I belong to Him. But do children ever do things that offend their parents? Or that ignore their parents' desires for them? Or that fail to live up to their parents' hopes for them? Yes of course. And so it is in God's family. Jesus is talking about family forgiveness when we do not fulfill what we owe to our Papa in heaven. Like the things brought to our minds in the first four requests.
- Why does He say 'as'? *Papa in heaven, just as we have forgiven the ones in this world who owe something to us, likewise forgive us.* Jesus assumes we have been forgiving people as a way of life. He assumes we understand the enormous debt God has forgiven us and have extended this same forgiveness to those who owe us debts that are puny by comparison. How could it be otherwise for any true member of His family?
- This is the only one of the six requests that Jesus felt the need to explain. He comes back to it in v 14-15. *If you don't forgive, God won't forgive you.* Why? Because you couldn't possibly be a member of **His** family. You couldn't possibly be **His** child. The Spirit of God could not possibly be dwelling in you if you are failing to forgive.
- **This request is aimed at turning to God as my Restorer.** *Papa Restorer, forgive me for letting you down.*

### **And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil**

- Yes, God forgives me when I fall short whenever I pray the fifth request. But the fact remains that we all struggle with sin. We are all tempted in different areas and in different ways. That too is part of our reality. We need God's help with this too. **This request is aimed at calling upon God as my Protector and Rescuer.**
- When Jesus says *Lead me not*, it sounds like He is saying we should ask God not to tempt us. But we know God does not tempt anyone, as James 1:13 says. James also tells us how temptation works: my desire, the desire that resides in me, in my heart, is drawn out and enticed by some external object or person or pursuit. My

desire then gives birth to a sinful action. This makes it clear what Jesus means in this request. *Pray Papa Protector, do not lead me into circumstances where my desires will be enticed and drawn out into sinful actions.* Jesus states it negatively, but we can also state it positively: *Papa Protector, keep me away from things You know will tempt me to fall.*

- Now would God ever lead us down a path that would expose us to temptation, to circumstances in which we might be tempted by our own inner desires? Yes indeed. He did so with Jesus. In Mt 4:1 it says that the Spirit of God led Jesus into the desert to be tempted by the devil. God led Him down that path. And later His greatest temptation was in the garden of Gethsemane, where His sweat fell to the ground like drops of blood and He prayed to God: *Take this cup from Me.* What did He mean? He meant *Lead Me not into temptation—Keep Me out of this situation where I will struggle with death and Satan will tempt Me to disobey Your will. Nevertheless not My will but Yours be done.* Jesus prayed this sixth request and then the third request of the Lord's prayer. But God did lead Him into it, and through it to the cross. And He did not fall.
- But others were tempted that day. Look at what Jesus said to the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, Mt 26:41: *Pray that you may not enter into temptation.* This is how we should pray when we are facing a path that we know will expose us to temptation. The disciples could not pray *Lead us not into temptation*, because God was leading them down a path with His Son where they would indeed be exposed. So Jesus tells them to instead pray that they would not enter into temptation. Pray you do not enter into a battle with your own desires and fears when the coming events overtake you. Pray that your desires will not overwhelm you and cause you to sin as you walk down this necessary path with Me. *Papa in heaven, keep me from experiencing temptation as I walk this path* is what they should have been praying. But they slept. And when God led them through that terrible hour alongside His own Son, they failed. They ran away. Peter denied he even knew Christ. As James would say, their strong desire to be safe and free was drawn out by the circumstances and gave birth to their sinful denial of Christ. God led them down this life path, but He did not tempt them. Their own desires and fears tempted them as they faced that terrible hour.
- We as God's children do not usually have to walk such a dangerous path. And Jesus in fact teaches us in this model prayer to ask God our Protector to keep us away from such circumstances. *Papa, lead me not into temptation. Keep me away from situations that will tempt me. Protect me today from situations that will expose my weaknesses to circumstances You know will be difficult for me. Papa, protect me in advance.*
- But when we do encounter temptation on life's path, then what? Jesus next tells us to pray, *Deliver us from the evil, or from the evil one. Papa, rescue me from this external evil coming upon me. Or, Papa, rescue me from this internal battle with my own desires and fears which are tempting me to do evil.* And thankfully, as Paul says in 1 Cor 10:13, God is always faithful to do so. He always provides us a way of escape so that we can endure.
- Now just think for a minute about what this request implies. First, it implies that my Papa in heaven has a deeply personal knowledge of me. He knows my weaknesses and my tendencies. And second, my Papa in heaven is willing to help me. Since He loves me, I can ask Him to use His knowledge of me to keep me away from things that might cause me to fall. He is willing to guard my path and keep me under the wing of His protection. And that is exactly what Jesus is telling us here to ask for. *Papa, lead me not into temptation.* And third, it implies that I am deeply and humbly aware of my own frailty. I know I can fall, so I ask God for help. And the more deeply I know and own my weaknesses, the more quickly I will be praying this sixth request and asking Him to help me escape the power temptation has over me. *Papa, deliver me from evil.*

God bless you.

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