

HOW TO PRAY

MATTHEW 6:9-13

“In this manner, therefore, pray: 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 forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

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

In the early 1960s Life magazine reported an incident that happened to President John F. Kennedy.

The article read, "A special, top-secret, direct line linked the President and the Strategic Air Force bomber and missile commands. Early one morning the President was awakened by a call on this line.

Expecting the worse, he picked up the phone, braced himself, and said, *'This is the president.'*

The voice on the other end of the line said, *'Oh, I'm sorry, I must have the wrong number. I'm trying to reach a French laundry.'*" It's intriguing to think a random person could accidentally gain access to a top secret line and call a person as important as the President of the United States. But you and I have access to a top secret line that connects us with someone even more important than the President.

As Christians, you and I can talk to God!

Jesus knew the tremendous privilege called prayer.

While He was on earth the heavenly switch board stayed lit up! Our Lord Jesus was always praying.

During His baptism... at His transfiguration... even on the cross Jesus prayed... In the four Gospels you'll notice that before every major decision or announcement Jesus made, He first took time to pray.

This is why in Luke 11 His disciples came to Jesus and asked Him, "**Lord, teach us to pray.**" They could've asked Him to teach them how to *heal the sick*, or *raise the dead*, or *multiply the loaves and fish*, or *walk on water*, or *cast out demons* - but they didn't!

Instead, they asked Jesus to teach them to pray!

Apparently, Jesus' disciples had gathered that the secret to their Master's miraculous life was somehow tied to His ability to pray, and pray effectively.

Understand, *we have to be taught to pray!* A vibrant, effective prayer life doesn't come naturally. We need instruction. In James 4:3 we're told, "**You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss.**" - or improperly.

In other words, not all prayers are effective prayers.

That's why Jesus' words in this morning's text are so important. He models for us successful praying.

Notice in verse 9 Jesus begins His instructions, "**In this manner, therefore, pray...**" "*In this manner*" or "*along these lines*" or "*after this pattern...*" Jesus knew proper prayer is better "**caught than taught.**" Prayer is best learned by example - so He gives us a model.

In these verses Jesus supplies His disciples the scaffolding for structuring a solid prayer life. This prayer is a skeleton, a framework, an outline to use.

There is nothing wrong with reciting *the Disciple's Prayer* on occasion, but realize this prayer was never intended for *mindless memorization* and *rote recital*.

In High School our football team would gather in the locker room before each game. We'd kneel, put our hands in a pile, and mumble this prayer. But when we got to toward the end, we'd all start to bark, "For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory." Then we'd run out yelling, "kill'm, stomp'm, hurt'm... let's win!"

Obviously, we were *praying amiss!* Our football team was guilty of the prohibition Jesus gave two verses earlier in Chapter 6, "do not use vain repetition."

Hey, it's easier to recite this prayer than it is to learn from it. The Lord's prayer is a model - it's a *structure* for our own words - it's not a just a *script* to echo.

One author writes, "In fewer than seventy words we find a masterpiece of the infinite mind of God, who alone could compress every conceivable element of true prayer into such a brief and simple form - a form even a young child can understand, but a mature believer cannot fully comprehend."

Understand, Jesus' model prayer is *prayer in perfect proportion*. Its an exact blend of the three types of prayer: **worship**, and **petition**, and **intercession**.

Notice first, it begins and ends with **worship**.

Over half the prayer is devoted to worship. So often we jump right into our requests without taking time to praise God. We need to bow our knee, admire His beauty, express our devotion. It's only after He knows we love Him for who He is; can make our requests.

This is why **petition** comes next. After *praise* we can *petition* God with both our physical and spiritual needs.

Finally, there's **intercession** sprinkled throughout this prayer. Notice the pronouns Jesus uses. They're all plural pronouns, "**our Father**" "**give us**" "**lead us.**"

The implication is that prayer is not something we do *by ourselves for ourselves*. In addition to private prayer, we also need to pray *with* and *for* one another.

In fact, this kind of prayer - the kind we'll be doing this week - picks up steam. There's added power in *together prayers*. As Jesus said in Matthew 18, "**If two of you agree on earth concerning anything, that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.**"

When my four kids lived at home if they ever got together and expressed a common desire I was always eager to answer. It wasn't often when I could satisfy all four kids at once... *And I think this is God's attitude*. He loves it when His people agree together on a request.

It reminds me of the young lady who did all her praying selfishly. She prayed *for herself, by herself*.

At the time she was praying diligently for a husband.

In church, she heard the pastor say she needed to pray for others. So that night she went home and prayed, "Lord, please give my mom a good son-in-law."

I suppose it was a step in the right direction, but she still missed the point. We need to pray *for each other, with each other*. And this what we plan to do this week.

But Jesus continues with His model prayer, verse 9, "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven."

The common vernacular in Palestine during NT times, and the language Jesus spoke, was the Aramaic form of Hebrew - and in Aramaic "*Father*" is the word "Abba" or "Daddy." It's a tender, loving, informal term.

Yet never would a Jew at the time of Jesus address the God of the universe as "Daddy." To the Hebrews God was a righteous dictator to be *feared and revered (a Godfather, not God the Father)* - not a papa to whom you can run, and with whom you can play and cuddle. But Jesus taught us a different side to God.

He taught us that when we go to God we need to remember we're *His children*, and *He's our Abba*.

There is an intimacy a believer can have with God.

Think for a moment - the supreme power in the Universe - the holy, omnipotent, sovereign Creator of all things invites us - wants us - to call Him "*Daddy*."

Every time you gaze at *a soothing sunset or a dazzling night sky* you can swell up with pride and praise, and think, "*Wow, MY Father, made that!*"

I have some friends who left our church and moved to the mountains of North Carolina where they attend an old, backwoods church, who had a country pastor.

They told me that four or five times during every sermon he stops and he says in his country drawl, *“Now don’t you forget it, Daddy loves His little chill’en.”*

And don’t you forget it, God loves you too!

We need to think of God as a loving Father. He cares for us with a sheltering love. He’s quick to forgive. He’s willing to trust with the keys to the car. He’s first to celebrate our triumphs, and He helps us recover from our defeats. God wants to be a dad - an Abba - to you!

We hear a lot of talk these days about the **Fatherhood of God**, and **brotherhood of man** - as if all humans are brothers, and God is the father of us all.

That’s true only in a very narrow, physical sense.

Certainly, we’re all made in God’s own image and likeness, but that doesn’t mean there’s a spiritual connection and relation between us and with God.

Actually, in John 8:44 Jesus told certain Jews, *“you are of your father the devil.”* Their spiritual paternity was of the devil, not God. They had the traits and nature indicative of the devil. John 1:12 identifies God’s true children, *“But as many as receive (Christ), to them He gave the right to become the children of God.”*

Only the Christian, the follower of Jesus, has the genuine right to call God his or her father!

It's interesting, whenever Jesus addressed God He always called Him "*Father*" or "*Abba*." It amazed the disciples that He was on such intimate terms with God.

But now Jesus turns to them and tells the disciples they too can relate to the eternal God as "*Daddy*."

The implication Jesus makes is that the disciple's relationship with the Father God is now on the same intimate terms as Jesus' relationship with His Father.

"In Christ" we can approach God with the same confidence with which Jesus approached God. The Father is just as accessible, just as willing to listen to us, just as eager to help us, as He was to help Jesus!

To address God as "*our Father*" reminds us that we can come boldly, not sheepishly, to God. We can expect the Almighty to hear and answer our prayers.

Remember, *Daddy loves His little chill'en*.

I love what the great preacher CH Spurgeon once said about our praying, "*Prayer pulls the rope down below and the great bells ring above in the ears of God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so timidly; others give only an occasional jerk at the rope. But he who communicates with heaven is the man who grasps the rope boldly and pulls continuously with all his might.*" Since God is our Father we can pray boldly!

So we're to pray, "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.*" I'm sure you heard of the little boy who came home from Sunday School claiming that he knew God's name - it's

“Howard.” He misunderstood this verse. It’s not *Howard be Your name*, its *“hallowed.”*

The word translated *“hallow”* is the Greek word *“hagios”* which means *“to set apart.”* It means *“to treat as different or unique.”* From it we get the word *“holy.”*

To say that God is love is one thing, but to say that God is *holy* is to say that He loves in a way that no one else loves... To say that He is faithful is one thing, but to say He is *holy* is to say that God is faithful in a way that no one else is faithful... To hallow God's name is to note His specialness - that He is in a category by Himself - nothing and no one else compares to Him.

To hallow God's name is to recognize how different and unique He is from us... Sometimes when we pray we project our own human limitations on God. We assume He can only work in ways we can imagine.

If we can't figure out a way for it to be done we tend to lack the confidence in God to do it. But when I hallow His name I realize I'm talking to Omnipotence - I'm praying to a God for whom nothing is impossible!

Realize, familiarity in a relationship is nice, but it has its pitfalls. If we're not careful familiarity can cause us to lose our sense of awe and reverence. Yes, God is my Daddy, but He also my Lord, my Master, my Ruler

God is *immanent* - He is as close as a father. But He's also *transcendent* - He rules over the universe!

God is both infinitely high and intimately nigh.

CS Lewis once said, "The prayer preceding all prayers should be: May it be the real I who speaks. May it be the real You that I speak to." We cannot pray properly until we get honest with ourselves, and until we fix our minds on the person to whom we're praying.

Prayer needs to be the true me talking to the true God. Sometimes we forget to whom we're praying.

Once a pastor turned to his church and said, "Now, let us pray for good luck." Really? This is why Jesus calls on us to hallow God's Name when we pray - to focus on who He is that we're actually addressing.

Next we should pray, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Once we see God enthroned in heaven full of grace and glory - then we can contrast that vision with our situation on earth: *man on the throne, a world full of sin and suffering*. And that prompts us to pray, God, Your kingdom come, Your will be done... Reign on earth, as You reign in heaven!

In a sense, when we pray for God's Kingdom to come we're looking to the future when Jesus returns, establishes His throne, and rules the world a thousand years - the Kingdom in its final, visible, political form.

And we're to pray for this... for Jesus to come again. Revelation 22:17 tells us, "the Spirit and the Bride (that's us) say come." But when the Bible speaks of God's Kingdom, it's not just talking about something future, His Kingdom also occupies the here and now.

In Luke 17 the Pharisees asked Jesus, *where is the Kingdom?* He said, "The kingdom of God does not come

visibly, nor will people say 'here it is' or 'there it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." Before the King rules physically - over human governments - He first comes to rule spiritually over human hearts.

To pray to God, "**Your kingdom come...**" is to surrender your will to the Master. It's to give Jesus the prerogative to order your life as He sees fit - to sit on the throne of your heart and build His Kingdom in you.

This means that prayer is not our opportunity to bend God's will to ours, but to align our will with His. To get in sync with His plans - not entice God to prop up ours.

Too often we're like babies - we're egocentric - the world revolves around us - life is no bigger than ourselves - our concerns no bigger than what effects us... Notice Jesus begins this prayer with the focus on God: "**YOUR Name, YOUR Kingdom, YOUR Will.**"

When we pray we do well to realize, "**This world was not organized for our comfort, but for our training.**" The priority in prayer is always, "**Your will be done...**"

Next Jesus tells us to pray, "**Give us this day our daily bread.**" Understand, the word "**bread**" speaks not just of a food group, but of all our daily sustenance.

"**Bread**" is a synonym for basic needs: food, clothing, shelter, job, transportation. Jesus is telling us that as God's kids we need to take our physical needs to Him.

There's an old Jimmy Stewart movie called "*Shenandoah*" where the family is sitting around the table, and the father bows his head to return thanks.

Stewart prays a terrible prayer. He basically takes credit for everything, yet thanks God anyway... (clip) "We worked dog bone hard, but we thank you anyway."

And I'm afraid this is our attitude at times, "We take credit, then we give God some thin, hollow thank-you."

It's a short-sighted attitude that doesn't recognize God as the source of all our material blessings. So what if we work hard, God gave us health and stamina.

James 1:17 tells us, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights." Your boss might employ you, but it's God who gives you the strength to work. Hold your breath for 90 seconds, and see how dependent you are on God! You need Him for your next breath!

I heard of a little old lady who lived next door to an outspoken atheist. She love the Lord, but the atheist constantly mocked her devotion. The lady was poor, but for the little she had she always thanked the Lord.

One day, she was praying, "Lord, I need some groceries. Please provide." The atheist heard her prayer. He decided he'd buy her some groceries, sit them on her front porch, and be there when she found them and started to praise God. He would silence her praise to God by taking credit for the kindness.

Well, as soon as the lady opened the door and found the food the atheist popped out of the bushes. She said, “Praise the Lord. God heard my prayer and provided my need.” He scoffed, “No you don’t. God didn’t provide those groceries. I bought them with my own money.” The lady thought for a second, and then really got excited. She shouted, “Wow, that means God got me the groceries and made the devil pay the bill.”

Notice, God promises us our daily bread - not our daily cake, or our daily caviar, or our daily chocolate mousse. God promises to meet our *needs* not *whims*.

I read recently where 100 years ago the average man had 70 wants. Today his grandson has 500 wants.

God does not promise to indulge our every desire, but He does promise to meet our every need!

Notice too, God promises to provide “our **daily bread.**” He doesn’t necessarily meet our needs monthly or yearly. We’d all like to be able to place an annual order - for God to drop a year’s supply on us.

But God wants us coming to Him everyday!

When Israel wandered through the desert God provided their needs each and every morning. He sent the miracle manna - bread from heaven. Israel would go out and gather the manna off the ground, *but there was a condition* - they could only collect enough for that day. If they tried to horde extra for several days the bread would turn sour and rot. God wanted them looking to Him on a day by day, hour by hour basis!

And this is how God wants us to trust Him - *day by day*, even *moment by moment*. It's been said, "Yard by yard life is hard, inch by inch life's a cinch." Don't get ahead of God. Pray, "give us this day our daily bread"

And we're also to pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." When you become a Christian all your sin - past, and present, and future sin - is washed away by the blood of Jesus. But when you sin you still need to ask God for His forgiveness. For God knows its the *act of asking* that keeps our heart spiritually fit - *humble and honest, fertile and frank, sensitive and submissive*. It's the unrepentant attitude that chokes out and strangles God's work in our hearts.

It's been said, "When we pray we must lay before God what is in us, not what ought to be in us." No phony facades when we pray! It has to be the real me who prays. I can't pretend. I have to be brutally honest.

And when we come clean, we feel and sense His forgiveness. The burden is lifted. His joy becomes real.

Someone commented, "bread is to our body what forgiveness is to our soul." It's true. A guilty conscience and a hunger stomach act in a similar manner. Both hold us in bondage - both preoccupy our thinking - both even dictate our behavior. Forgiveness satisfies a guilty psyche like bread eases a famished stomach.

Notice, Jesus uses an interesting word for "sin" here, He calls it "*debt*"! Sin creates a debt - it hangs a cloud over our

heads - the interest accumulates - the due date gets closer. The only relief is God's forgiveness!

Recall, on the cross, Jesus uttered the words, "it is finished" - in the Greek language it reads, "*Te-telestai.*"

It was a term Jesus borrowed from the business world of Jerusalem. When a debt was paid the creditor would write on the man's account, "*Te-telestai*" - or "paid in full." Only Jesus can erase your debt of sin!

But notice according to this text, you can only ask for forgiveness if you're willing to give it. We're allowed to pray, "**forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**"

God will forgive you to the extent you forgive others.

In other words, God supplies us with forgiveness, but you determine the size of your bucket. If you want total forgiveness, make sure you don't still harbor a grudge!

Often we call this model prayer, "*The Lord's Prayer,*" but verse 12 makes it clear Jesus would never have prayed this prayer. He had no need to pray, "**forgive us our debts**" - because Jesus had never sinned.

This is not the Lord's Prayer - this is our prayer. A better name for it would be "*The Disciples Prayer.*"

And we should also pray, "**And do not lead us into temptation.**" A few years ago thieves broke into a car in the parking lot of Berkmar Methodist Church.

A note appeared in their next church newsletter encouraging church members not to leave valuables in their cars. The

blurb read, “Let us not lead others into temptation and maybe we will be delivered from evil.”

That’s not the meaning of our text.

Realize that Jesus’ concern at the beginning of verse 13 isn’t that God would orchestrate a temptation.

James 1:13 makes it clear, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he himself tempt anyone.”

The thought here is NOT that God would ever tempt us to do evil - *but we may try to take on too much, or get ourselves into a situation we can’t handle.*

In essence Jesus is telling us to pray, “God, if You see us get in over our heads - or bite off more than we can chew - then save us from our own foolishness. Lord, steer us clear from the tempting situation!”

Whenever I drive in rush hour traffic I tune in WSB, and Smiling Mark McKay. He’s called “the gridlock guy” for a reason. He flies over the city’s interstates in a helicopter, and checks up on the congested areas.

He sees more than we do. His vantage point is higher. He sees the accidents, bottlenecks, stalls - he gets you home by leading you around the temptations.

And this is the course God steers for our lives. He wants us to get to our heavenly home, so if you ask Him He’ll guide you around the dangers and difficulties.

But we also should pray, “deliver us from the evil one.” It’s significant that Jesus tells us to pray for protection against

Satan. The Puritan preacher, Thomas Watson, said, "Satan envies man's happiness. To see a cloud of dust so near to God - and himself, once a glorious angel, cast out of heavenly paradise - makes him curse mankind with incurable hatred."

The evil one is constantly plotting your demise. How foolish to assume we can handle Satan on our own.

Martin Luther wrote, "For still our ancient foe, doth seek to work us woe; His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal."

We are no match for the evil one, **but Satan is no match for Jesus**. Never forget 1 John 4:4, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

Jesus has overcome the wicked one!

On the cross He vanquished our archenemy. He broke the chains of evil. He crushed Satan's power.

Satan and his cronies now flee at the mere mention of Jesus' name! He is more than able to deliver us!

The night before Jesus was crucified He prayed for His disciples. In John 17:15 Jesus prayed, "I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one."

Our Father heard the prayer of His Son, and for Jesus' sake He delivers us from Satan's snares.

When we're attacked spiritually - whether by sickness, or depression, or a barrage of evil thoughts, or a chain of terrible circumstances - recognize you're under assault, and pray for the Father's deliverance!

This model prayer ends... “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

The word “Amen” means “right on,” or “absolutely,” or “you can bank on it.” It’s a word of affirmation.

Here Jesus ends His model prayer just as He began it - *with worship and praise!* We can never enter into prayer effectively until we have truly worshipped, but neither can we exit prayer and face a hostile world with courage and hope without worship in our hearts.

Well, let me sum it up. Here’s how we should pray...

“Our Father in heaven” - Never forget it, “Daddy loves His little chill’en.” “Hallowed be Your name.” God is a friend, but He’s more than a friend - He’s our Boss!

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Let’s submit to God’s will. It’s Him first!

“Give us this day our daily bread.” God drives a bread truck - and He makes deliveries daily. You need to make sure that you’re one of the stops on His route.

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” The only sin God can’t forgive is the sin we won’t confess. Admit it and God will wipe it away.

“And do not lead us into temptation.” God is in the traffic-copter and He’s able to get you home, so ask...

And “deliver us from the evil one.” “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” God can deliver!

And the prayer closes, “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” Let’s keep our eyes on

God as we pray, and His Kingdom and power and glory will become realities in our lives and church!

Let's all stand, and here's how I want to close this AM. Together let's pray the prayer Jesus taught us...

“In this manner, therefore, pray... (are you ready?)

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 forgive our debtors.

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

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