

The Lord's Prayer
Matthew 6:7-15

Turn to Matthew 6. The Lord's Prayer is about in the middle of the sermon on the mount. If the sermon on the mount was the crown of the Lord's teaching, his prayer is the great jewel that's front and center.

The bigger package, in 6:1-21, is living righteously because we want our Father in heaven so see it. Because if we live in his ways so he will see, then he will reward us. And that's a reward it would be very sad to lose. While urging us to do the right thing so God will see it, and reward us, Jesus teaches us how to pray.

Our Scripture for today is 6:7-15. That's nine verses. The Lord's Prayer is five verses long. Before the prayer, and after it, Jesus takes two verses to tell us how *not* to pray. So he tells us how not to pray, and then he shows us how to pray, and then he tells us another way not to pray. So will go through this like that. But first we will read the whole section:

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, your holy name be honoured, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today 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 the evil one."

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

How Not to Pray, Part One: Bad Prayer Math – 6:7-8

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Chew on this, my brothers and sisters: "They think they will be heard because of their many words, but your Father knows what you need before you ask him." Bad prayer math says that the longer the prayer, the more the words, the better a chance we have of persuading God to act. We still think like this. Jesus says, No, no, no. Your Father knows what you need before you ask.

The other bad prayer math says that the more people we can email and get praying, the more people praying, the better a chance we have of persuading God to act.

When someone in the church is in distress, we let each other know and pray for each other. That is part of life together before our Father. The Scriptures encourage that. But leave the math out of it. We are acting together out of love, we're not persuading God with a long list of names.

Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. In Matt 10 Jesus will tell us that God knows the number of hairs on our heads, each one of us. For some of us the number changes every day, but he's on it.

Later in this sermon, Jesus will say, "seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." He knows what you need, he will take care of these things.

The Lord's Transition to the Lord's Prayer

We need to feel the transition here. Listen to Jesus: *And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, your name, your kingdom, your will."*

Did you catch this? *Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, your name, your kingdom, your will."* This is crucial.

When parents know what their child needs, they don't wait for the child to ask. They just give the child what it needs. That's clearly what Jesus means. Because our Father's already taking care of *our* needs, *we* can pray about *his* name and *his* kingdom and *his* will.

We try to persuade our Father to give us what we are sure we need. Jesus does not think that is the real purpose of prayer. I want to know the key, the secret, of getting God to do what I want. Jesus thinks that's too much like the pagans. I think prayer is so that I can get something from God. Jesus thinks prayer is so that God can get more of me.

The trouble happens when we are in distress, and we need help, and God is not helping. That's how it seems to us, but Jesus is telling us something different. God knows exactly what we need, and he is supplying right now, he's taking care of us. "Your Father is already on it," says Jesus.

It is not wrong to pray for our needs. Peter says, "throw your cares on him, because he cares for you." Paul says, "don't worry about anything, but in everything, with thanksgiving, tell God what you need. God will guard you," Paul says, "and he'll be with you."

But don't miss what Jesus is saying. Parents don't wait until their children ask, to give them what they need. Parents just take care of their children. Jesus says, *Your Father knows what you need before you ask, and he's already providing. This, then is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, your name, your kingdom, your will."*

The Confidence and Submission of the Lord's Prayer

We submit because we are confident. The prayer assumes confidence. My Father is taking care of *my* needs, so I can devote myself to *his* kingdom and righteousness. "I can seek the Father's kingdom, and his righteousness, because he's taking care of all the things I need." A big step.

Here's how Ed Neufeld prays: Our Father in heaven, your holy name be honoured, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. And now, Father, here's what I really want. I want you to do my will, and take care of my kingdom and my name."

What if Jesus means what he says? What if I don't need to worry about my needs, and the dangers and troubles that are crowding in on me, because my Father is already on it? What if the Father is already giving me, one day at a time, what I need for that day? That's the way Jesus tells us to think about this.

Give us today our daily bread. "Give us whatever we need to seek your kingdom and righteousness today." There's an emphasis in this line on one day at a time. *Give us today our daily bread.* "Give us today whatever we need for today." The Lord's Prayer is a daily prayer.

At the end of chapter 6, Jesus will say, "*Don't worry about tomorrow. Let tomorrow worry about tomorrow. Every day has enough evil of its own.*" I love this line. Jesus, the cheerful pessimist. "Don't worry about tomorrow, today has plenty of troubles of its own." Give us today, Father, whatever we need today, to seek you and serve you today.

It is a different way of thinking and living, and it is a different way of praying, too.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. Debts and trespasses and sins are all used interchangeably here. If we take this line just as it stands, and I don't see why we would not, the Father does not forgive us if we are not already forgiving others. "Forgive us as we have forgiven others." This is a hard teaching, because sometimes we've been badly hurt.

The fifth beatitude was, *Good news from God for the merciful, for you will receive mercy.* This is one of the ways in which the gate to life is narrow, and the path is steep. We forgive those who injure us. We don't try to get even, we don't try to hurt them, we don't insult or even hate them.

After the Lord's Prayer, Jesus has another short section on "how not to pray." And in that second "how not to pray" section, Jesus tells us bluntly that if we are not forgiving others, the Father will not forgive us. They will owe us what they do not repay, and we will forgive the debt.

On the other hand, there's good news here. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of forgiveness. Jesus knows that his followers, the beatitude people, the people whose righteousness goes past the scribe and Pharisees, you and I, regularly sin against God, and against each other.

Jesus was not surprised that the righteous would sin against God, and each other, every day. It's going to happen. As long as we make sure we're forgiving one another, it's life in the kingdom.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. The problem with testing, and the problem with temptation, and the danger of the evil one, is that these take us away from praying, "Father, your name, your kingdom, your will." Temptation and the evil one take us away from seeking first our Father's kingdom and his righteousness.

And so we pray for help. We don't do well when we are tested and tempted. We lose sight of God. We need help. The evil one wants above all to steer us away from seeking first our Father's kingdom and his righteousness. He's good at this, and we are weak.

So we pray, "don't lead us into testing or temptation, we don't do well, rescue us from evil and the evil one, we need your help, Father." This is in the Lord's Prayer, because God wants to help us, and will help us. This is part of what we need every day, and we ask for it. Because we don't want to stop praying, "Father, your name, your kingdom, your will."

The Prayer the Lord Prayed

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. This is in Matthew 6. In Matthew 4, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. When Jesus says we should pray, *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*, he's talking about himself. I'm convinced Jesus prayed most of the Lord's Prayer for himself, during the 40 days. He was led into temptation, and struggled against the evil one.

"Your holy name be honoured." Every temptation began, "since you are the Son of God." The Father called Jesus "Son of God" at his baptism, just before the 40 days began. Satan said, "since you are the Son of God, you should do this." But Jesus prayed, "Father, your name not mine."

Satan said, "I will give you all the kingdoms of the world." But Jesus prayed, "Father, may your kingdom come, may your will be done, may earth submit to heaven." Satan said, "make these stones into bread," but Jesus said, "Father, give me bread for today." Which did not happen.

The Spirit led Jesus out to be tempted. Jesus prayed, "Father, I'm not doing well, I need help, rescue me from the evil one." We should assume Jesus was very close to giving in to Satan's pull. He was close to leaving his mission, his calling. So he prayed the Lord's prayer.

In Luke 11, the Lord's Prayer happens in a different setting. Jesus was apart from the disciples, praying by himself. When he joined them again, they said, "Teach us to pray." That means, "we want to pray like you pray." And then he taught them the Lord's Prayer; probably that's what he was praying. We want to follow Jesus, don't we. So let's pray what he prayed.

There's a story in Luke 22, Jesus talking to Peter. *Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you like wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.*" Satan got permission to test them, tempt them. Jesus prayed that Simon Peter's faith would not fail. Maybe that's being rescued from the evil one. Satan wanted Simon's faith to fail.

At the end of Paul's life, he says, *"I kept the faith. I fought the fight, I ran the race, I kept the faith."* A bit later in that same chapter he writes, *"I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack, and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom."*

Paul endured no end of evil attacks! His life was full of it. In what way did the Lord rescue him from them all? He kept the faith. That means he was delivered by the Lord, and in that way the Lord brought Paul safely into his heavenly kingdom.

What if, what we really need is to keep the faith? What if God rescued Jesus this way during his 40 days in the wilderness? What if Jesus made it through the 40 days because he kept praying this prayer, and the Father delivered him from the evil one? What if *that* is the real battle in our troubles, and the Father rescues us from that, because we keep praying?

You people still fight the fight and you run the race. You people keep the faith. All the dark forces and powers have not taken you off that. What if the power of God's glorious strength is the what has kept you? You've kept the faith in all your tests. What is that is the Spirit's power as much as raising the dead? Let's put some teeth in this prayer.

Do not lead us into temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

Imagine the Father's Response to your Prayer

Imagine yourself praying, "Father, your name not mine, your kingdom not mine, your will not mine, give us whatever we need, every day, to stay with this, Father." And imagine the Father, totally delighted, exuberant, he rolls up his sleeves, and says to himself, "I will see it done! They are praying like my Son prayed, this is perfect, I will certainly do this!"

We say, "my troubles are not going away." Our Father says to us, "I know. But my Son's troubles did not go away either. Remember what he said, 'in the world, you will have trouble, but cheer up, I've defeated the world.'"

"If you pray this," says the Father, "I will make it happen. Ask me for this and you will receive, seek this from me and you will find it, knock at this gate, and the gate will be opened. Your life will bring honour to my holy name, my kingdom will grow in you, and through you. The power and strength of my glorious might will make it happen."

And this is not separate from needing forgiveness every day, and forgiving each other every day. We will still sin against God and against one another. But he obviously can still answer the rest of this prayer while that continues. The prayer itself assumes that.

How not to Pray, Part Two – Matt 6:14-15

If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

We've already spoken about this. When we pray, how many words does not matter. Forgiving other people, on the other hand, matters a lot. To answer this prayer for us, the Father has to give us a lot. So we will forgive others the same way.

Freedom in the Lord's Prayer

There is a freedom in praying the Lord's prayer. If we can get there, can pray this and mean it, it takes the pressure off. If that really is the most important thing, let's get ourselves there.

The only success that counts is if we can pray this and mean it. It is available to everyone. Many kind of success on this earth have limited entry. Not everyone can get in, only a few. Depends on what kind of success, but most of them have pressure, and they are all fragile. Things we can't control take success away from us.

But Jesus taught us that the only thing that counts is having the Father's reward, seeking the Father's kingdom and righteousness.

Judi sent me an email about leading our worship last Sunday. She was stressed about how to do this with all the masks. What kind of singing will that be? It gave her a bad week. Then she decided, "I could just do it for my Father in heaven." There is real freedom from that.

Success is actually doable, really quite doable. The pressure was off. The Lord's Prayer in in this longer section on "do it for the Father, and get the Father's reward, it would be sad to miss out on that." Doing it for the Father, and praying the Lord's Prayer, both take us the same way.

There is a freedom in living this way. That's one reason why Jesus called it good news. That's why he said, "*My burden is easy, and my load is light.*" Amen.

PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, since you already know everything we need, since you provide for us, we will pray like this: may your holy name be honoured, Father, may your kingdom come, may your will be done, may earth submit to heaven. Give us today whatever we need to serve you. Forgive us our sins, as we forgave those who sinned against us. Don't lead us into testing or temptation, we don't do well. Rescue us from evil and the evil one, we need your help every day. You are the King, you have the power, so yours be the glory.

And Father, we have seen tests and troubles, and we still hope in you. We still trust in you. Our faith has not failed. How much have you been doing for us to make that true? We don't know. But we know enough to thank you and praise you. Amen.

BENEDICTION: The Lord bless us and keep us; the Lord make his face shine on us and be gracious to us; the Lord turn his face toward us and give us peace. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.