

The Lord's Prayer * Mathew 6:5-15

May 15, 2022 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

This morning, we are launching into a brand new sermon series called 'Great Prayers.' And this series is a neat case study in discerning the will of God. As I was praying over what we would look at next as a church, three or four different circumstances overlapped and pointed directly towards a series like this and so I think that God has something to say to us through this series.

So in the next few weeks, we're going to look together at some of the 'Great Prayers' of the Bible. There are lots of prayers in the Bible, places where people pray to God, and I think that we can learn a lot about *how to pray* and *what to pray for* by listening to these prayers, so that's what we're going to do for the next few weeks.

My hope for this series is that 1. You'll be able to apply some of these prayers in your own daily prayer life and 2. If you don't already have a daily prayer life, that you'll start to, and build on a foundation of these great prayers in the Bible.

To start it all off, we're going to look together at the big kahuna of prayers, the greatest of the great, 'the Lord's prayer' that we pray every week. The Lord's Prayer technically appears twice in the Bible, once in Matthew and once in Luke, but we're going to focus on Matthew because that's the one that 'the Lord's Prayer' that we use in church comes from.

So turn with me to Matthew 6, Matthew 6 and we'll look together at the Lord's Prayer.

Now, since we're in Matthew 6, that means we're right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. And that means that we get a little teaching about prayer from Jesus before the prayer itself. And I think that this is very helpful as we think about the 'how-to' of prayer, so let's just briefly look at verses 5-8.

So Matthew 6, starting at verse 5 –

5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

This is Jesus' way of saying 'pray directly to the Father.'

I know that this might seem a little foreign in our day and age, but in Jesus' time, it was more common for religious people to get out on the street corner and pray up a storm. They would pray long and hard in public; the problem though is that they weren't really talking to God. They were just putting on a show for their fellow men. They wanted to get the honour of seeming to be deeply religious, deeply pious people.

And so Jesus says – 'Don't do that. Pray directly to the Father.' Set aside a quiet time, find yourself a quiet place and talk directly with the Lord. No middle men, no audience, just pray directly to the Father. That's verses 5 & 6; now verse 7 –

“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.” (Mat 6:7 ESV).

Again, Jesus says ‘Don’t do that. Pray *honestly* to the Father.’ See there was this belief in the ancient world that you could wear down the gods by your constant praying. The Roman philosopher Seneca wrote an interesting maxim – ‘fatigue the gods by your prayers.’ Like a kid saying – ‘can we go to McDonald’s’ over and over again, hoping that they’ll get their way by sheer force of prayer.

Don’t do that, Jesus says. Just go to God and talk to Him about whatever’s on your heart. You don’t have to wear down His defences first; He is already committed to you. So just go honestly into the presence of God and pour out your heart.

I personally have found this incredibly important. There’s a sense in which you might feel like you have to take on this pious affectation to get God to listen to you; there’s a sense in which we might think that the longer you pray, the better you are, but the reality is that God delights to hear from His children, no matter how long or how short. And so He says ‘Come and pour out your heart to me.’

So pray directly, pray honestly and finally, pray confidently to the Father. Verse 8:

8 Do not be like them, (the pagans who rattle on for hours and hours in prayer) for your Father knows what you need before you ask him (Mat 6:5-8 NIV).

That means that we can pray confidently, knowing that God will give us what He knows in His infinite and compassionate wisdom that we need. We pray directly to Him, we pray honestly to Him, knowing that even if we don’t get the words just right, our gracious Father will provide exactly what we need. It might not be exactly what we prayed for, but in His compassionate wisdom, God knows that it’s exactly what we need.

We pray directly, we pray honestly and we pray confidently to the Lord. That’s the ‘how’ of prayer; what about the what? What do we pray as we pray directly, honestly and confidently? Well that’s what Jesus teaches next.

Verse 9 – Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Now let’s stop there, because these three clauses really go together and then the last three go together too. If you look really closely at the pronouns here, you’ll see that these first three prayers are all about God – ‘Our Father in Heaven – that’s the address; hallowed be YOUR name, let YOUR kingdom come, let YOUR will be done.’

The first three prayers of the Lord’s prayer are concerned entirely with God’s purposes. ‘Your name, your kingdom, your will.’ The last three clauses are focused on us – give US this day our daily bread, forgive US our trespassers, lead US not into temptation.

So that alone, right away, should tell us something about the focus of our prayers. We very naturally pray for ourselves and for friends and family and neighbours, but the Lord’s Prayer suggests that we should be just as intentional about praying for God’s purposes.

And what are those?

Well, 'our Father in Heaven,' that directs our prayer and reminds us of two really important realities. First we are praying to God AS OUR FATHER. Not as a disinterested, far-removed deity whose attention we have to get with hours' worth of prayer. No we are talking to God as our Father, as one who is committed to us, as one who is SO committed to us that He sent His one and only Son to make US His children.

So we pray directly and honestly and confidently to – 'our Father' – and then we add – 'who art in Heaven' – because God is not just any old dad. He is the sovereign ruler of the universe, high and exalted in the Heavens. And so we pray 'Our Father, who art in Heaven' to remember (as John Calvin wrote) 'His fatherly love towards us and His unbounded power [over us].'ⁱ

And then we pray, 'hallowed be your name.'

Now admittedly, this is probably the most obscure clause in all of the prayer, because, be honest, how many of you used the word 'hallow' in conversation this week? This month? This year? So what exactly are we praying when we pray 'hallowed be your name'?

Let me put it to you like this. How many of you have china or good dishes that you get out on special occasions? It's Christmas, it's Thanksgiving, it's Easter, the whole family's there, you pull out the china and get out the silver and set the table fit for a king.

Now imagine for a minute that you take one of the serving spoons and you use it to scrape the grass clippings out of the lawnmower. Or you take grandma's special tea cup and throw it on the ground with some water so the dog can drink out of it.

Does that seem right? No. But why not? It's because we get that those dishes are different, is set apart, is special; they're not just any old tableware, they're 'the good stuff.' They're set apart and special.

Same with God. He is unlike anyone else in all the world – holy and set apart from everything else in the world. And yet people don't always act that way. They think of God as less than the sovereign Creator than He is or they think of Him as an expletive to say when something's unexpected or they just don't think of Him at all.

And so Jesus teaches us right off the bat to pray – 'Hallowed be your name.' 'May Your name be set apart as holy and special.' 'Name' is just a shorthand for the whole of a person and so when we pray 'Hallowed be Your name', we are saying 'Father in Heaven, may You be set apart as holy and special and unlike anything else in this world. May we all understand and appreciate just how valuable You are.' John Stott puts it like this - 'Lord, may we make you our Number One'ⁱⁱⁱ and I think it's just as reasonable to say 'God, may people know You as the good God that You are.'

So priority number one here in prayer – praying that God's name be hallowed, that people's concept of God be just as wonderful as He really is.

Our Father, who art in Heaven, may Your name be hallowed, may Your Kingdom come. Let your Kingdom authority rule in our world and in our hearts. God's Kingdom is justice and fairness and peace

and plenty; so of course, we pray that Jesus would return and establish God's Kingdom on earth for all of eternity.

Priority number two – the establishment of God's kingdom.

As we wait for it though, we also pray 'let Your will be done. May Your will be accomplished on earth and in my heart the way that it is in heaven.' And listen, there's no greater prayer than this. If you think back to Romans 12:2, Paul tells us that God's will is everything that is good and pleasing and perfect; why would you not want that? And so we pray along with Jesus, not my will, but Yours be done.

Priority three – seeing God's will accomplished on earth, in our homes, in our hearts, as it is in Heaven.

So Father in Heaven, Let people set You apart as special in their hearts, let Your Kingdom come, let Your will be done... and with that Jesus switches gears from praying God's purposes in order to pray for our needs.

He says – verse 11 -

11 Give us this day our daily bread,

Now I think that this is something for us to wrestle with as Canadians living in the 21st century. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, 'where their daily bread would come from' was a huge question and so in many cases, then and now, people are truly and literally depending on God for their daily bread.

Me though, I went to No Frills this week and got bread and milk and sugar and cheese and bananas and meat... How do I pray 'give us this day our daily bread?' when I am more than provided for? This request – 'give us this day our daily bread' – is really about deepening our dependence on God; how do we do that when we already HAVE our daily bread?

Just something for you to think about. In a sense, I'm tempted to pray 'thank You, Lord, for our daily bread which You so consistently provide.' Or 'give to those who so desperately need it their daily bread.' Just something for you to consider.

But admittedly, we can still make this prayer our own as a way to deepen our dependence on God. Because this is not just about bread, but about the things that we need for the day. I think J. I. Packer is helpful here; he wrote "Thus, "bread" covers all food; so the prayer is for farmers and against famine. Again, the prayer covers clothing, shelter, and physical health; so the prayer becomes an intercession for social and medical services. Or again, the prayer covers money and power to earn, and so becomes a cry against poverty, unemployment, and national policies which produce or prolong both."ⁱⁱⁱ

In the end, this is ultimately about praying 'Lord, give us the things that we need for today.' That's prayer priority number four – the things that we need on a daily basis.

And then Jesus addresses another specific thing that we need on a daily basis - forgiveness. Verse 12 - 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Now this is interesting because just after this prayer, Jesus adds - 14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Mat 6:14-15 ESV).

Now that seems a little off, because it seems to make forgiveness dependent upon our willingness to forgive, but here's what I think it going on here.

Jesus anticipates that we will need forgiveness, even when we are redeemed, blood bought children of God. Jesus also anticipates that other people will need our forgiveness as they fall short of God's glorious ideal and wrong us. So, Jesus says, just as YOU need God's forgiveness, they need YOUR forgiveness; if you truly value God's forgiveness, then you'll extend forgiveness to the person who needs it too.

And so we pray – forgive us our debts – and we should probably also pray 'help us to forgive our debtors.'

That's priority five – forgive our sins and priority six -

13 And lead us not into temptation –

That is – Lord, help us not to sin, show us the way out of it so that we do not do evil in Your eyes...

And priority seven – deliver us from the evil around us, whether it be anger or injustice or violence or sin.

And then your instinct is probably to go 'For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory,' but it's not there, is it? It's interesting; the Church later added that part,^{iv} but it's a fitting way to close the prayer. Because the eternal power and glory of God is the only reason that we can pray like this. It's His power and glory that enables Him to provide what we need, to forgive our sin, to deliver us from evil.

But, as far as Matthew is concerned, it's not there. Jesus didn't teach it, but I think that Frederick Bruner is onto something when he says "The fact that the Lord's Prayer ends so raggedly... is probably an invitation to close the prayer with one's own free petitions... The rough ending is an open ending"^v for us to extend. Jesus did not intend for us simply to say these exact words and be done with it; rather, He gave us this prayer as a model for us to fill out and expand upon given our own unique circumstances.

So that's it; that's the Lord's Prayer, seven priorities that Jesus teaches us to pray about. Let me give you one observation and then a closing thought to take home with you.

First, compare this prayer with what you usually pray in your personal prayer times or what we pray together in our pastoral prayer times on Sundays. I suspect, and this applies to me too, we spend most of our time praying for our daily needs – our daily bread.

There's nothing wrong with that; clearly these are the things that are closest to our hearts as created beings, but I think it's important for us to broaden our prayer lives to include everything Jesus invites us to pray here. We have seven prayer priorities here and we often prioritize just one. And so I want to

encourage you when you sit down to pray to pray not just for your daily bread, but for the whole scope of our needs and God's purposes that we find in the Lord's Prayer.

Now I'm hoping that this series will help all of us with this. And again, this is a case of God knowing what He's doing, because as I started putting this series together, I pulled out a lot of the prayers of the Bible and then realized that I could loosely line them up with each of the prayer priorities found in the Lord's Prayer. It's not perfect, but it's close, and I think it will give us biblical examples of how to pray for the hallowing of God's name, the establishment of His will and Kingdom, God giving us what we need. You'll see that in the series outline – we will use a prayer from the Bible as an example of how we can pray each of these priorities in our own lives. So stay tuned for that.

And finally, let me send you with this. Let the Lord's Prayer be your prayer.

Don't just think of it as the prayer we recite on Sunday mornings together but let it guide and shape your prayer life. It's not just Jesus' prayer; it's not just the Church's prayer. Let it be YOUR prayer.

And what's more, let it be YOUR PRAYER.

In a sense, the Lord's Prayer is a template. A fill-in-the-blank sort of thing which gives you headings to direct your prayer and then gives you space to personalize it. So when you pray 'Our Father in Heaven' think about what it means that God is YOUR FATHER. When you pray 'Let Your will be done' think about the ways that you need to see God's will unfold in your life. When you pray, 'give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our trespasses, lead us not into temptation – those are things that you and God alone know about – put them into this prayer so that it truly is YOUR prayer.

You know, I have to admit, once or twice, I've messed up the Lord's Prayer up in the front here and I think 'geez, they're gonna be like 'our pastor doesn't even know the Lord's Prayer,' but the reality is, I got so caught up thinking about specific things and personalizing it for myself that I lost track of where we were. So I've tried to be a bit more focused here but at home, I make this prayer my own. I pray these clauses for myself, for my family, for us as a church. And I encourage you to do the same.

Let the Lord's Prayer be your prayer.

ⁱ Quoted in Bruner, *The Christbook (Matthew 1-12)*, 297.

ⁱⁱ John Stott, *Matthew*, (Bible Speaks Today), OliveTree, 4(6:1-18).

ⁱⁱⁱ J. I. Packer, *Growing in Christ*, 89.

^{iv} <https://www.gotquestions.org/for-thine-is-the-kingdom.html>

While the earliest manuscripts of Matthew and Luke do not have the doxology at the end, another early Christian document does. *The Didache*, a 'church manual' from the late first century includes the Lord's Prayer as follows:

And do not pray as the wicked [do]; pray instead this way, as the Lord directed in his gospel:

Our Father who are in heaven,
May your name be acclaimed as holy,
May your kingdom come,
May your will come to pass on earth as it does in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
And cancel for us our debt,
As we cancel [debts] for those who are indebted to us,
And do not bring us into temptation,
But preserve us from evil [or, from the evil one].
For power and glory are yours forever.
Pray this way thrice daily.

(translation by Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache* (Hermeneia), 134.

^v Frederick Bruner, *The Christbook (Matthew 1-12)*, 314.