

The Purpose of Prayer

Matthew 6:9-13

⁹ “This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

We are going to begin our study of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9 through 15. Really the prayer it goes through verse 13, and verses 14 and 15 are an addendum to the prayer in order to explain an element of this prayer.

There is just so much in this prayer that we will have to take several weeks to study it.

For many people, this prayer has been something that they have recited. Especially if you come from certain denomination background, you recited this one at the church worship service just about every Sunday. However, it is infinitely more than just something we recite at a church service.

Today, we will first have an overview of this Lord’s Prayer. And hopefully, after we are finished with the study of this Lord’s Prayer, I hope your prayer life and the general outlook of your faith will change. I hope it will be a life changing experience for all of us.

The study of Beatitude changed my life and my outlook and the way I understand kingdom life. I hope through this study, our prayer life will change too.

I like to read the Lord’s Prayer in the KJV.

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

¹⁰ Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Now we face this tremendous portion of Scripture that deals with one of the most important and vital subject in all of the Christian life – the subject of prayer.

What is prayer and what is the purpose of prayer? It is a subject that is much talked about, yet much misunderstood. The believer must learn how to pray, in order to experience the fullness of communion with God. And this Lord's Prayer will teach us the principle or the pattern to do that yet, ultimately, it is up to the individuals and their diligent prayer habit that will really help one experience the fullness of communion with God.

If we do not know how to pray, and if we do not know what to pray for, then it does not do us much good to keep on praying.

The Sermon on the Mount by Jesus began with the standards of Jesus's Kingdom which is in contrast to the standards of the world whether it was the days of Jesus or today.

After telling us the standard of His Kingdom, Jesus encouraged us to be the salt and light of the world.

Then in Chapter 5, Jesus said that the Jews did not know the Bible and just followed the traditions and the hearsay of the leaders. He obviously is telling us the importance of reading and studying the Word of God.

Now in this chapter 6, Jesus uses three subject matters to discuss religious activities that people are engaged in. He is talking here about praying, and of course, giving and helping which He already talked about just prior to this subject of praying, and He will be talking about fasting after this one.

Giving and helping have to do with your attitude toward others; praying has to do with your attitude toward God, and fasting has to do with yourself. So Jesus covers all the areas that have to do with a person's relationships – the vertical relationship with God, the horizontal relationship with other people, and of course, the relationship with your own self.

Of the three subject matters He uses here, the greater emphasis is placed on praying as we can see in the Scripture because prayer is really an important activity of a believer. Giving is also important, but you are going to give properly only when you give out of constant communion with God. If you are in communion with God, then your heart will be filled with gratefulness and giving becomes an outward expression of your gratefulness. And of course fasting is meaningless apart from an intimate relationship with God.

Therefore the concept of prayer then is very basic to giving and fasting.

So let us talk about praying or should I say, how to pray. The Apostle Paul said in **Romans 8:26**, "We do not know what we ought to pray for." Then in the following, he says, "But the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."

In other words God is ever and always helping us in our prayers because we don't know how to pray or for what to pray.

I am sure you know this already, but perhaps never really thought about it carefully that there are many people who are not even Christians, but they pray. And usually they pray for themselves. I am not sure to whom they are praying, they pray.

So here, Jesus is giving us a detailed description of how we are to pray. How we are to pray is specifically and comprehensively covered in this one simple prayer Jesus taught His disciples. It really is a magnificent way of showing Jesus's infinite wisdom just as He summarized the whole Bible to the young rich lawyer when He told him to love the Lord God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength and to love his neighbor as himself.

Here Jesus gives us a very simple sample prayer that encompasses the totality of every conceivable element in prayer and reduced it to one simple pattern.

Now before we go on with the study of this prayer, I just like to say that there are two ultimate tests of true spirituality, and they are one, **the study of the Word of God** and two, you guessed it, it is **prayer**.

Why is studying the Word of God so important? Because we will not even know how to pray unless we know what the Bible teaches about God, about God's will, about our lives and our problems, and even how to talk to God. The Bible says in **James 5:16**, "**The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.**"

So it is **the study of the Word of God that gives birth to a meaningful prayer life.**

Now let us look at this prayer that we call Lord's Prayer. It is not long at all. It is not how long your prayer is, but it is whether your prayer touches on the vital and necessary elements. Listen carefully, I say it again; **it is not how long your prayer is, but whether your prayer touches on the vital and necessary elements.** In order to touch the vital and necessary elements, it cannot be too short either. I heard one time, someone said; he does not even need to say anything in prayer because God already knows what he is going to say. Certainly God knows what you have in your mind, but God still wants you to your part, and leave God's part to God. We have to remember, God does not need you but He always chooses to get you involved and He likes you to do your part because it shows your love for Him.

Let me first talk about what people do in prayer. There are people who always plead with God to give them the Holy Spirit; what they don't know is they already have the Holy Spirit – the bible says so if you are born of the Spirit. You already have the Spirit. There are also people who plead with God for strength. The Bible says in **Philippians 4:13**, "**I can do all things through Him**" meaning Jesus Christ, "**who gives me strength.**" Many people also say in prayers, "Lord, be with us," but Jesus said in **Matthew 28:20**, "**And surely I am with you always.**"

These are just some of the examples that if we know the Bible, we would know how not to pray and of course, how to pray as well. That is why studying the Word of God is important. There are some people who say, "Oh, I just like to pray because when I pray, I know I am with God and I feel joyous and blessed and He tells me what to do. But all these Bible and Greek and Hebrew, all that stuff, I am leaving it to the pastors.

If you are like that, then your prayers are going to be in vacuum. In other words, you are praying for yourself and for your so called edification only.

The Bible says that Jesus very often would rise really early like before dawn and go into the mountain to pray. The Bible also said that Jesus often prayed with the Father all night long. The disciples obviously saw in Jesus a tremendous commitment to prayer, and that is probably why they asked Jesus in **Luke 11:1**, "Lord, teach us to pray."

To that question, Jesus taught this Lord's Prayer to His disciples. Therefore, perhaps we should call it Disciples' Prayer. You have to realize the disciples of Jesus were Jews, and they had to have believed in traditional Jewish teachings and perspectives on prayers. The Jewish teachings and perspectives on prayers were, first, they thought they had a right to pray. They got this belief from the verse such as **Psalm 145:18**, "The LORD is near to all who call upon him." **Psalm 91:15** said, "When he calls to me, I will answer him, says the LORD."

Secondly, they believed that prayer should be constant. The true and noble purpose behind such teaching was to avoid praying only when you are in a desperate situation. There are way too many Christians who are like that. They only pray when they are in desperate situations. It has been 10 years since 9-11. When 9-11 happened, the church attendance in New York city was up by more than 30% and the national average was increased by 25%. But a mere 2 months later, the church attendance went back down to the pre-9-11 average.

There are so many who think prayer is like a parachute. You are glad it's there, but hope you never have to use it. Oh, how quickly we forget and how we only pray when we are desperate.

So the Jews taught their people to pray constantly since prayer is not some kind of an emergency appeal. Prayer is an unbroken conversation built around a living, loving fellowship with God. They were right on the money as far as the concept was concerned.

They also believed that prayers should incorporate certain elements. They believed that prayers should incorporate **love and praise**. Next is **gratitude or thanksgiving**. Thirdly, they believed that their prayers should **incorporate a sense of God's holiness**, a sense of awe and reverence. Another thing is they believed that you **didn't pray unless your heart was really right**, meaning you don't go to God in some ritualistic way.

Now all the things I have said about what the Jews believed about prayer, there is nothing wrong with them. In fact, we need to learn from them – love and praise, gratitude and thanksgiving, a recognition of God's holiness, a desire to please and obey God, all of these were elements of true Jewish prayers.

Now what is the one thing you pray for when you go on vacation? Good weather, safe trip. We certainly don't want to have hurricane or tornadoes while on vacation. We certainly don't want to have car accidents or some other types of accidents either. So you pray for sunny day, but what about farmers who are praying for rain in that same area where you are vacationing?

Most of us come to the Lord in prayer with a whole lot of personal desires, don't we? Lord, do this for me, Lord, do that for me. Lord, my needs are such and such. Lord, I am having this problem, or that problem.

We certainly have developed self-centeredness in our prayer even today in our personal prayers as well as in our church. We are really preoccupied with ourselves and our concerns.

In the Lord's prayer, how does Jesus pray?

My Father in heaven, Give **me** today my daily bread. And forgive **me** my debts, and also forgive **my** debtors. And lead **me** not into temptation, but deliver **me** from the evil one. Is that how He prayed?

I was taught that this was a prayer example and I needed to pray like Jesus but I was taught to put my name in every place where our or us appeared.

But as I study this, I realize that is not what Jesus intended. "**Our** Father," "**our** daily bread," "**our** debts," "**our** debtors" why?

Because true prayer encompasses the community of faith, the kingdom of faith. It never isolates one individual out to have his or her needs met no matter how it affects everybody else. Remember we belong to the body of Christ? So, just as you would not pray for my arm only but I don't care what happens to my legs, prayer is not to be self-centered, the to be kingdom-centered.

A person who offers true prayer comes to pray in humility to submit himself to the will of God. Jesus prayed His prayer on Mount Olives in **Luke chapter 22**, and in **verse 42**, He says, "**not my will, but Your will**." That is the heart of the truest prayer that seeks to submit himself to the will of God.

Jesus starts out His prayer with "**Our Father**." That means we have a Father-child relationship with God. God is our Father – loving Father who cares for us and provides and meets all of our needs. He is our Father. But He is also the One in Heaven. Like a

dad, a very close and intimate to His children, yet He is holy and we acknowledge His holiness with awe and reverence at the same time.

"**Hallowed be Your name**," means to sanctify the name of God. It means we have the object of worship and the worshipers of the object which is God. And we make His name holy. How do we do that? Through our life of obedience. Remember the verse in **Matthew 5:16**? "**Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.**"

"**Your kingdom come**." We have a sovereign king and we are the subjects of His kingdom. It means for us to bring in His Kingdom into this world. How do we do that? By making disciples of all nations.

"**Your will be done**," we have a Master and we are the bond-servant of the Master. In other words, we are the slaves and our will is the will of our Master. It means for us to do His will, and moreover, His will in this world as well, not just in our lives.

That is the first part of the prayer that has to do with God. "Hallowed be thy name." "Thy kingdom come." "Thy will be done." And those focused on God and His glory; then we see three other requests following these are the ones focusing on man and his needs. "Give us this day our daily bread." "Forgive us our debts." "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." God is the supreme issue here, and **not until God is in the proper perspective can man pray properly about his own needs.**

Then "**Give us this day our daily bread**." We have a provider and we are the ones provided. We must know this and be grateful. We live in abundance today. It is hard to imagine in our abundance to think of how to eat our next meal. It is always what to eat not how to eat for most of us. Some of you may say, well I am not as rich as you. But as I have shared with you, no matter how poor you think you are, we are so much richer than those people I have witnessed in Mexico and Africa.

"Give us this day our bread" is to acknowledge the fact that He is the source of all our needs and everything that we are provided with. **Matthew 5:45** says, "**He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.**" God provides for non-believers as well as believers. Without His provision, whether you are a Christian or a non-Christian, we will not have anything.

Some of you might say, why does God provide for the non-believers? Just imagine if God did not provide for the non-believers, since so many of us work for non-believers, how will we all live? We would all be starving. God provides.

"**Forgive us our debts**," we have a Savior and sinner relationship with God. And God is the only One who can forgive our sins and deliver us from our sinfulness. It has to do with victorious aspects of our Christian life.

"Lead us not into temptation," we have a leader and we are the follower. Jesus is our Master and we are His disciples. Only through His power and His strength can we be lead away from evil.

That's the purpose of prayer.

This is an overview of the Prayer. It is like the Korean proverb that says, You are just licking the outside of a watermelon. That is what we just did. It does not do justice. Many of you perhaps heard of an acronym ACTS. It means adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. Perhaps this acronym has served you well in the past. But it is now for you to graduate from the elementary school and go up to high school. ACTS does well summarize the intent of this prayer, but there is far more than that.

Starting next week, we will look at the Lord's prayer in detail.

Let us pray.