

# The Prayer of Jesus

Bible Background • MATTHEW 6:9–15

Printed Text • MATTHEW 6:9–15 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 40:1–10, 16–17

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: IDENTIFY the place of the Lord’s Prayer in the life of the church, LONG for the kingdom of God described in the Lord’s Prayer to be manifested in our lives, and PRAY the Lord’s Prayer with deeper appreciation for its meaning.

## In Focus

Virginia knelt beside her bed and bowed her head. She knew that only God could loosen the grip that fear had on her. After nine years of remission from cancer, she had begun to feel similar symptoms as before. Virginia thought cancer may have returned.

She had made an appointment, and the doctor had run tests. Virginia had sat patiently for several blood tests and even an MRI. When the doctor called back, Virginia hoped she would get some answers, but the doctor decided they needed to run additional tests. At the same time, at work she was being considered for a promotion. Virginia wanted the promotion and already had ideas of how she could renovate the department. However, if the cancer returned, she would not have enough strength to supervise several people and do her work.

“Our Father, who art in heaven,” Virginia prayed. “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 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.”

*Have you ever had something happen to you that was not in your control? Where did you turn? Today we want to examine God’s teachings on prayer.*

## Keep in Mind

“May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10, NLT).

## Words You Should Know

**Decapolis.** de-KA-poe-liss.

## Say It Correctly

**A. Daily** (v. 11) epiousios (Gk.) — That which is needed for tomorrow

**B. Debts** (v. 12) opheilema (Gk.) — That which is incurred after failure to pay what is due

## KJV

**Matthew 6:9** After this manner therefore pray ye: 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.  
14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:  
15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

## NLT

**Matthew 6:9** Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.  
10 May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.  
11 Give us today the food we need,  
12 and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.  
13 And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.  
14 "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you.  
15 But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins."

## The People, Places, and Times

**The Lord's Prayer.** Jesus taught His disciples how to pray by giving them a model, which is recorded both in Matthew 6:9–13 and Luke 11:1–4. Matthew places his telling of the prayer as part of the Sermon on the Mount near the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Luke, however, recounts the model prayer later, after His ministry has taken a turn out of Galilee and toward Jerusalem where Jesus would be killed. No doubt the subject of prayer is important enough that Jesus could have repeated Himself to forgetful disciples. The only other significant variation between the Gospel writers' records of the prayer is whether we should ask for forgiveness of "debts" (Matthew) or of "sins" (Luke). This is an interesting insight into the Jewish mind at the time. Debt is considered the same as sin, or just as bad as sin. Even today, we often speak of Jesus' sacrifice to forgive our sin as "paying the debt" for us.

## Background

Jesus taught that the true righteousness of the kingdom must be applied in the everyday activities of life. He cautioned against practicing piety to impress other people. Almsgiving was designed to be a display of mercy, but the Pharisees had distorted it to demonstrate their devotion to religious duties in almsgiving and prayer. Giving without fanfare and quietly praying will receive its rewards.

Just as the Pharisees made a public display in giving, so they did in praying. They prayed in public places to be seen and heard by men. Jesus says they got their reward in the applause of the people. Instead of condemning prayer in general, though, the Lord purified the practice by directing us into a private place to be alone and pray to our Father. Jesus went on to give us an example of how to pray with certain guidelines.

### At-A-Glance

1. Our Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13)
2. Our Forgiveness (vv. 14–15)

## In Depth

**1. Our Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13)** Jesus gave His followers a model prayer known as the Lord’s Prayer. We should use this prayer as a pattern, as Jesus said to pray “after this manner.” The purpose of prayer is to glorify God, and these are the guidelines for prayer: 1. it should involve worship, reverence, and exaltation of our Father; 2. it should concern itself with the work God is engaged in, namely, the establishment of God’s kingdom and His will be done on earth; 3. it should be concerned with daily needs; 4. it should contain confession and seek forgiveness; and finally, 5. it should seek protection and deliverance from the evil one. Notice this model prayer begins with the phrase “Our Father.” We put God’s concerns first; then we can bring in our own needs. This is the God-appointed way of having our needs met because prayer also prepares us for God’s answer.

*How do you pray most often? Is your prayer structured like the Lord’s Prayer, another prayer, or not structured at all?*

**2. Our Forgiveness (vv. 14–15)** Forgiveness puts you in the right relationship with your brothers and sisters and with God. This enables you to pray effectively; therefore, forgiveness is an important part of prayer. We must pray with a forgiving spirit toward others. Christians must be prepared and willing to forgive the offenses of others. As Christ just taught earlier in this same sermon: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7). If you do not forgive offenders, God will not forgive you.

We all need forgiveness. To be forgiven is to be released from all guilt and condemnation. Forgiving means we should not be bitter or hostile, seek revenge, or hold hard feelings against another person. We should not rejoice when others fall on hard times.

*How do we reconcile Jesus’ message that God’s willingness to forgive is limited to our own willingness to forgive, with the message that Jesus offers forgiveness of sin free to all?*

### Search the Scriptures

1. How is forgiveness connected to prayer (v. 14)?
2. What does verse 13 mean in light of Matthew 4:1–11 (Lesson 10)? What does verse 11 mean in light of Matthew 6:2–4 (Lesson 11)?

### Discuss the Meaning

1. What is prayer?
2. Why must we pray that God “lead us not into temptation” when we know that God does not tempt anyone (James 1:13)?
3. What elements of prayer are modeled in the Lord’s Prayer? Are our prayers ineffective if we do not use these exact words or follow this exact outline?

### Liberating Lesson

Many of us are tempted to spiritualize the meaning of “give us today our daily bread” as seeking a daily spiritual insight to feed our souls. However, this is not what Jesus was talking about. The majority of people in Jesus’ day (and even until the 18th century) were food insecure, meaning they didn’t know how (or even if) they would get their next meal. While this is not a worry for middle- and upper-class America, there are many around the world and even in the wealthiest cities who are food insecure today. These people understand the necessity of praying to God to give them just the barest minimum of food for just that day. Those of us who have never had to worry about how to afford groceries must remember that this is only by the grace of God, our only Provider. If we are so blessed as to be sure of having food in our pantries today and tomorrow, we can thank God for removing a terrible weight of worry from our shoulders.

**Application for Activation**

Prayer is needed today more than ever. This week, set aside a specific time each day for prayer. Jesus and the psalmist prayed in the morning, but anytime is good to talk to God (Mark 1:35, Psalm 63:1). Ask the Father to bring to your mind those people who have hurt you or persecuted you. Then ask Him to help you to forgive those people. If you can contact any of them, do so, and resolve whatever differences you may have. Remember, prayer changes things.

**Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

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**Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

Matthew 6:9–15 In verses 9 through 14, Jesus tells the disciples how they should pray in a model prayer that we commonly call the Lord’s Prayer. While it is an excellent prayer, used publicly for various reasons, it was not given just for us to memorize and recite. It was not intended to replace the corporate prayer in the synagogue, but to give His disciples (and us) a model for their own private prayer time. Entire books have been written analyzing this prayer. It is rich in meaning and subject to various interpretations. Although it is short, it is a powerful model for the way that we should pray in our own prayer closets. This prayer format begins with words of worship, expresses a desire for God’s will to be done, thanks, God for supplying one’s physical needs, and asks forgiveness for sins and the help to stand against temptation.

### **9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.**

Jesus starts by affirming that God is the Father, the one in the heavens. This was typical of many formal Jewish prayers. We know that Jesus referred to God as “Abba” (AH-bah), which is an affectionate, familiar term, similar to our current use of the term “dad.” It shows the kind of relationship He had with God, the Father. We should seek to have that same kind of closeness and intimacy in our relationship with God. But in this prayer, God is addressed as “Father,” not as “Dad.” The Greek for “Father” is pater (PAH-tare). This is His title. He is the parent. We are reminded that our Father is the God of heaven. He is absolute holiness. He is our Father, the Father of all who have received Jesus Christ.

Fatherhood is a very sensitive and delicate issue in African American communities and for others who have experienced absent or negative relationships with their fathers. Whether we blame personal irresponsibility, the lingering effects of slavery, the current evils of racism, or other forms of oppression, we can identify forces that contribute to the negative feelings associated with the term father. Some modern theologians question whether we really should address God as Father since the term father can evoke powerfully negative feelings related to the absence of fathers or negative relationships with fathers who are present in the home. But this is the wrong strategy to adopt because God has revealed Himself as Father. To those who have not experienced the love and security of a father in the home, we look at Psalm 68:5 to replace that bad image and give assurance of our God who is a father to the fatherless. We cannot take away the fact that Jesus addressed God as Father. God has repeatedly revealed Himself to be our holy and loving Father. This image of the father-child relationship can guide us as we work to repair damaged hearts and heal those who have been wounded in relationships.

After this opening address, the Lord’s Prayer contains seven petitions. There are three “Thou” or “Thy” God petitions—things we are praying God will do for His glory. There are four “we” petitions—things we want God to do for His children. The first “Thy” petition, “Hallowed be thy name” (Matthew 6:9), would more accurately be stated, “Let Thy name be hallowed.” This means that God’s name should be sanctified, revered, and considered holy. For Jewish people, the name of God was considered so holy, it could not be spoken or even written in its entirety. The name of God was treated with reverence because it was considered synonymous with God. For us, the prayer is a request that in all the earth the name of God would speak of God’s holiness and kingdom. This is both a personal request and a communal, missionary request.

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

In one respect, “thy kingdom come” refers to the end times, when there will be the fulfillment of all prophecies and expectations. At that time, God’s kingdom will prevail, and God will rule and reign on earth as He does in heaven. This is what we look forward to as Christians and what we seek to make a reality in our daily lives while we wait for the kingdom to come in totality. Jesus is asking us to live in ways that demonstrate our faith that the kingdom will, indeed, come. Not only are we to pray that the fullness of God’s kingdom will be evident on earth, but we are to live in ways that reveal God is the King of our lives even now.

The prayer continues with the desire for the coming of the kingdom—that is, God’s ultimate will for the earth and humanity. As we pray these words, we have to consider what we are doing day to day to witness to God’s kingdom on earth. What do we see on earth that is not like God’s will and not like the kingdom of heaven? Jesus prays that the earth will mirror heaven according to God’s will. Jesus manifests that reality in His earthly

ministry. In heaven, there is no sickness, so He heals the sick. In heaven, there is no demonic oppression, so He casts out demons. In the kingdom, there is no hunger, so He feeds the hungry. In heaven there is no bondage, so He frees the captives. The Kingdom of God is of peace, righteousness, and justice. Jesus lives that kingdom and calls us to pray and live out the same. It is also a prayer for God's will to be done in our individual lives and our communities. We can ask this prayer in complete confidence because we know that God loves us and would not do anything in our lives that would ultimately be bad for us. While something we desire may look good to us today, God knows whether it will truly be good in our future. Likewise, we may go through situations that are uncomfortable or difficult, but it is God's will to work it out for our good (Romans 8:28). We can pray this in confidence because God has all wisdom and our faith is in Him.

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

At this point, the “we” petitions begin, as we request things from God. Some scholars have debated whether this means literal bread in terms of our daily physical needs, or whether “daily bread” should be taken in the spiritual sense, or even in the understanding of what will be consumed at the heavenly banquet. The Greek word for “daily” is *epiousios* (ep-ee- OO-see-occe), and since this prayer is its only occurrence in Scripture, it is difficult to translate. Most likely it refers to that which is needed just for tomorrow. Each day, we are to ask God for just enough to get by through the next day. This simple request is not about money. We are not asking God to set up a large bank account for us. We are simply asking Him to give us what we need for today and the most immediate future. Whether we have need of food, shelter, clothing, hope, healing, or grace, we are to pray as trusting children, asking our Father for what is needful for today. This is a prayer that may have called to mind the story of God providing manna in the wilderness to Israel for Jesus' hearers. That was an instance in which God literally provided bread for God's people each day and only enough for that day. It is God's sovereign will and Jesus' prayer that people receive enough daily food to eat. That makes it our prayer and call as Jesus' body in the earth.

Many of us pass over this verse quickly because we have never known days without enough to eat, but people in many parts of the world are hungry—some do not live very far from us. They have learned what it means to truly have to trust God to provide for their basic needs. When we pray this prayer, we should remember those who are hungry.

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

The object of our prayer for forgiveness is the most widely varied word in this passage. Some translations use the word “debts” (KJV); others seek to harmonize with Luke's record and use “sins” (NLT). When the early Bible translator John Wycliffe translated the passage, he pulled the word “trespasses” from a few verses down (Matthew 6:14). This version was used in the Book of Common Prayer and therefore entered the liturgy of many church traditions. The best understanding of this word is perhaps a combination of all three. The Greek word for “debts” is *opheilema* (oh-FAY-lay-mah), which literally means failure to pay what is due. Common people in Judea in Jesus' day struggled with having enough money with the threat of debtors prison looming. The situation is not unlike the plight of many today. In a spiritual context, though, all of us have failed to live up to our duties to both God and humankind. The word also has the sense of a moral failure or a fault. Sin is a universal disease in all of us. This verse literally means that we are asking God to forgive us in the same proportion in which we forgive others. That is pretty scary. This means that if we say, “I will never forgive so-and-so for what he has done” or “I will never forget what you did to me,” we are actually asking God not to forgive us! Human forgiveness and God's forgiveness are all wrapped up together.

As we have experienced the initial forgiveness of God at the Cross, we have been made capable of forgiving others. Let's remember how much God has forgiven us and have that same attitude toward others.

**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.**

This is a difficult passage to understand because it implies God actively “leads” us into temptation. The expression is intended as a petition for God’s help when we face the inevitable temptations and trials that come in this life. The epistle of James cautions us never to say that God is tempting us (James 1:13–14). Other translations of this verse give a more helpful interpretation of what Jesus is praying such as “don’t let us yield to temptation”. This interpretation helps to point out that the desire is to have God keep us faithful when we are tempted to become unfaithful by the lusts of the world, the difficulties of life, or the ways of the ungodly. Another possible example of this is when Jesus tells Peter that he will deny Him because the enemy desires to sift him as wheat (tempt him to unfaithfulness), but Jesus has already prayed for him that his faith will not fail him and that he will be kept in that trial.

The Lord’s Prayer continues with a request to be delivered from evil (Matthew 6:13). The more accurate translation of the Greek word *poneros* (poe-nay-ROCE) is used here as “evil one.” When times of testing come, as they will, then we pray to be delivered from the evil one—Satan. These two petitions—to resist temptation and to be rescued from evil—go together. Some people feel Christians should not undergo trials and temptations. But Jesus said we would have tribulation in the world (John 16:33). We should be of good cheer in the midst of them, however, because we know that He has overcome the world. So when we are tempted, when we suffer, when we are tossed and driven by the storms of life, we pray for the strength to bear it, to come through it, and to be liberated from the evil one.

**14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.**

Finally, Jesus goes back to the subject of forgiveness, mentioned in the prayer. These verses are not part of the Lord’s Prayer but are included to emphasize the importance of forgiveness and the fact that forgiveness must go two ways in the life of the Christian. As seen in Jesus’ parable of the Unforgiving Servant, our Master will show us just as much mercy as we show those subordinate to us (Matthew 18:21–35). We forgive in part because we realize we too have been forgiven much. We also forgive because we recognize the image of God in our neighbor. Whether or not they ask for forgiveness, whether or not they even think they need forgiveness, we are to forgive because they are God’s child as much as we are.

We sing and pray the Lord’s Prayer so often that it can become rote and lose its meaning for us. But when we look at it with fresh eyes, the prayer can come alive again and give us, as Jesus intended, clear instructions on how to pray effectively. How serious are we in wanting God’s kingdom to come and His will to be done? Do we live as kingdom people, aware of who and whose we are? How easy or difficult is it for us to forgive others when they do something wrong to us? How satisfied are we with having just our daily needs met, as opposed to all our wants and desires? And, in the course of going about our daily lives, how much awareness do we show—in our thoughts, actions, and treatment of others—of the truth of Matthew 6:14–15? These are all questions that arise when we take time to really reflect and meditate on the Lord’s Prayer.

## **Daily Bible Readings**

### **MONDAY**

God's Name Is "Our Father"  
(Isaiah 63:15–16; 64:8–9)

### **TUESDAY**

The Adopted Children of God  
(Romans 8:12–17)

### **WEDNESDAY**

Enticed by Temptation  
(James 1:12–15)

### **THURSDAY**

Forgive the Sins of Fellow Believers  
(Luke 17:1–4)

### **FRIDAY**

Forgive the Offender  
(2 Corinthians 2:5–11)

### **SATURDAY**

Forgive Like God in Christ Forgives  
(Ephesians 4:25–5:2)

### **SUNDAY**

Praying and Living the Lord's Prayer  
(Matthew 6:9–15)