

Matthew 6:9-15 *Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who is 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 also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Today we come to the very special portion of Scripture which is commonly known as “The Lord’s Prayer.” Most Christians have memorized this prayer in one form or another, due to the teaching of such by most Christian churches, both Catholic and Protestant. Like most of you, I learned this prayer early. And is still one of the few portions of Scripture that almost every believer can recite by memory.

Yes, some teach “trespasses” instead of “debts,” but that is just a translation discrepancy. And others leave out the final “For Yours (or Thine) is the kingdom ...” because it does not appear in many of the early manuscripts. Some say “forever and ever” at the end and most say just “forever” because that better represents the original Greek. And many have learned it in the King James Version, using “who art in heaven” and “Thy name,” etc. However you might have learned it, let’s recite it together, best we can, by memory. *[congregation does so]*

It is called “The Lord’s Prayer” because Jesus began by teaching, “Pray then in this way ...” And because of this, many have assumed that Jesus intended this to be a memorized prayer, oft recited as taught. However, this seems to contradict His instruction just two verses before in 6:7 where He says: *“Do not use meaningless repetition ...”*

Now some would argue “the Lord’s Prayer is not meaningless” which it is not. But to repeat it constantly as our primary prayer to God could easily become, and probably would become, meaningless. In fact, think back to our recitation of it – and for many we would agree that we recited it, but did not truly pray it to God.

I argue that Jesus intended this to be a model for our private prayer life – not a “prescription” for a recited prayer. In this prayer we see the essential elements of a healthy personal prayer life. Biblical scholars have outlined this prayer in many ways, but I offer my suggested outline as follows:

5 Essential Elements to Prayer

ADORATION (v. 9)

SUBMISSION (v. 10)

PETITION (v. 11)

CONTRITION (v. 12)

PROTECTION (v. 13)

Let’s look at each in order.

ADORATION

The majority of the Psalms are prayers of adoration – worship, thanksgiving and exaltation to our God. It is no wonder that Jesus begins with this element in His “model prayer,” for adoration should be the primary element in all our prayers. And we would do well be begin our prayers with adoration, whether brief or extended. Here are some familiar Scriptural challenges to this practice:

Psalms 150:6 *Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!*

Philippians 4:4 *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice!*

1 Thessalonians 5:18 *In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Hebrews 13:15 *Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.*

Can we ever praise God enough? Can our reason for thanksgiving ever go dry? No! And adoration goes beyond even praise or thanksgiving. Adoration is showing deep love and worship for the person of the Godhead. "Hallowed be Your name" is acknowledgment of the holiness and pure perfection of the matchless name and person of Yahweh. We adore Him.

And note also that Jesus teaches that the primary recipient of our prayer is to be "Our Father who is in heaven." Scripture teaches that we are to pray to the Father of the Trinity, through the authority (name) of the Son of the Trinity, in the power and utterance of the Spirit of the Trinity. Surely we can direct our prayer to the Son or the Spirit when addressing a specific aspect of their ministry, but we are here taught that the norm is to address our prayer to "Our Heavenly Father."

√ In the word "Our" is implied a precious intimacy with the Father, and also a common relationship we have with all who call upon their God.

√ In the word "Father" we understand our relationship not only as created being to Creator, but as beloved adopted child to this welcoming Sovereign.

√ In the word "Heavenly" we understand that this God is like unto an earthly father in His watchful guidance and protection and encouragement, yet exalted above all others. **ADORE HIM!**

SUBMISSION

It is well said that the primary purpose of prayer is to mold my will to His. Bowing at His feet in humble submission to His sovereignty I both demonstrate and learn my proper place.

Psalms 95:6-7 *Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.*

Here at His feet we learn and affirm that He is God and we are not. It is here we choose to repeat the prayer of Jesus in the garden, "Not my will, but Thy will be done." It is here we say in essence, "Your kingdom come in my heart, in the same way as it is in heaven. May I be as obedient to Your will and direction as are the angels in heaven."

In submissive prayer may we learn to WAIT, to YIELD, to PAUSE and to be as truly content with "no" answers as with "yes" answers. May we always come as clay to be molded, rather than with arguments to convince. Dear Lord God, Thy will be done in me! **YIELD TO HIM!**

PETITION

It is worth noting that the shortest verse and element of this model prayer is petition. Yet most of us would admit that the majority of our prayer time is spent in petition. Clearly God bids us come and lay our many petitions at His feet. He invites us to ASK, SEEK and KNOCK as we will see when we come to 7:7 in this sermon. But petition should not encompass the bulk of our prayer.

Neither should our petition be solely for our personal needs. He wants petition for our world, our nation, our community, our family. He wants petition for the hungry, the helpless, the persecuted and the fatherless. He wants petition for the spiritually lost and spiritually dead. Indeed, our prayers should extend far beyond "Lord, help me today."

Remember also that God is not to be treated as a "magic genie in a bottle." We are not to rub His lamp expecting Him to jump at our command. We are to pray respectfully and thankfully for the privilege of petition, waiting for His perfect and always good answer.

Philippians 4:6 *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

Perhaps the most needed personal petition is the one for which James guarantees an answer:

James 1:6 *But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.* **ASK OF HIM!**

CONTRITION

If there is one thing that David learned through his awful sin against Bathsheba and Uriah it was this:

Psalm 51:17 *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.*

Therefore, Jesus teaches *“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”*

√ This prayer acknowledges my sin, or debt, to God and to others.

√ This prayer asks God for what only God can give – forgiveness of the debt of sin. Yes, Jesus has died to pay the debt for our sin, but we must receive the gift God has given.

√ This prayer teaches that God does not simply want the words “forgive me” but the sincere and contrite heart that must accompany the request.

√ This prayer promises that God will not reject a sincere and contrite confession of sin and will grant forgiveness and restore righteousness. This is even clearer in John’s teaching:

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Is confession of sin and contrition of heart a regular element of your personal prayer life? It should be!

PROTECTION

The fifth element of personal prayer should be prayer for strength through temptation and protection from the evil one – for both yourself and your loved ones.

“Lead us not into temptation” could be wrongly interpreted as teaching that God leads us into temptation. But this cannot be true because of James’ clear teaching:

James 1:13 *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.*

So Jesus is teaching that we should pray to God that He lead us away from temptation and help us through temptation. Paul teaches that God gives us great resource to help us in temptation:

1 Corinthians 10:13 *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.*

As I see it, this is the answer to our prayer for help through temptation. This is how God “leads us not into temptation.” He does allow the evil one to tempt us, that we might be strengthened. But He carefully screens each insidious temptation so that there will be no temptation given, no trap laid, that I cannot personally handle. Thank you, dear Heavenly protector! AND – God always provides a way out, if I will only be willing to take it. In many cases this is to RUN or JUST SAY NO!

James 4:7b *Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

“Deliver us from evil” is a further plea for God’s help. How many times have we asked God to deliver our loved ones from evil, or to keep our church from scandal? - hopefully countless times. This should be a prayer that is uttered often. It could well be that this element of prayer is that which is neglected more than others. But since we are in a continual spiritual battle we must learn to ask for God to be our shield and to run to Him for shelter.

Proverbs 18:10 *The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous runs into it and is safe.*

POSTLUDE TO THE LORD’S PRAYER

The model prayer is concluded in verse 13 with further closing adoration – a good way to close any prayer. Whether these words should be included is in dispute, since *“For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen”* is not in many of the earliest manuscripts we possess. But the appropriateness of its content cannot be disputed.

But beyond the prayer, Jesus goes on in verses 14 and 15 to give additional insight on the element of contrite forgiveness. It is as if He knew this issue of forgiveness was of special importance and that it may well be the most difficult for His disciples to practice well.

Matthew 6:14-15 *For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.*

One can hardly misconstrue the meaning of “if you don’t forgive others your Father will not forgive you.” Is Jesus teaching that our eternal destiny is dependent on our forgiveness of others? If so, our honest assessment must be that we are lost, for there is not a one who has not held a grudge and found it hard to forgive an offender. And eternal security is “out the window” if this is the accurate interpretation.

No, I say. Eternal security is a Scripturally well-documented doctrine. If one is truly born again he cannot lose his/her salvation by sin, for the eternal consequence of our sin is fully paid for by the sacrifice of our Savior. Yet sin by the believer does have consequence – specifically, clouded fellowship with God and withheld earthly blessing. I contend that this must be the meaning of Jesus’ Lord’s Prayer postlude.

To me, the key is the meaning of “forgive.” After my years of study and contemplation with God on this issue, I have discovered the best practical definition of forgiveness to be: treating an offender with the same respect and love as if he/she had not committed the offense.

It is not “forgetting” or “ignoring.” Nor is it ceasing to be hurt or otherwise affected by the offense. It is not a stoic “I don’t care.” And certainly it is not absolving the offender of any consequence of sin – only God can forgive in such a way. For some offenses it may take years, or even a lifetime to remove the hurt and pain.

But forgiveness of an offender is not an option for the Christian. We are to show mercy as God has shown mercy to us. God treats us sinners who have received Christ as Savior with love and respect – “just as if I’d” never sinned (that is truly what “justified” means). God can still be “grieved” and as all-knowing can never truly forget. Yet He removes our sin “*as far as the east is from the west*” (Psalm 103:12) and TREATS US AS IF WE HAD NEVER OFFENDED HIM – true forgiveness.

Who has offended you? The offense might have happened today or long ago, but if you have not forgiven that one – treating them and thinking of them as if they had never offended you – you have not truly forgiven them. And bringing up that offense to others is a good indication that you have NOT forgiven. It is not gone, but is still fresh, though it may have happened long ago.

AND YOU ARE IN BONDAGE to that offense if it is not forgiven. YOU ARE IN SIN if that offense is not forgiven. And God “will not forgive you” in the sense that fellowship is clouded and blessing is withheld. This is what is meant in the prayer by “forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.” In our prayers to God we are to release all resentment, malice and wanting to “get even” with our earthly offenders so that our fellowship with God might be unclouded and our blessings not withheld.

GOD HELP US to pray in the manner and model of The Lord’s Prayer – ADORATION, SUBMISSION, PETITION, CONTRITION and PROTECTION.

And GOD HELP US to truly forgive our offenders with the mercy and love with which you forgive us!