

Lord, Teach Us to Pray

Jesus' disciples had seen him pray many times. Sometimes he prayed all night and sometimes his prayers were just one sentence. But Jesus' followers made the connection between Jesus' intense prayer life and the power he showed in every aspect of life. They must have realized that prayer was the link. Finally, one disciple asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Jesus gave them a deceptively simple, childlike prayer which has come to be known as "The Lord's Prayer." The prayer is recorded in Luke 11:2-4 and Matthew 6:9-13. Matthew's version highlights seven key parts:

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*

—Matthew 6:9-13

In this pattern, Jesus provided his followers with guidelines for prayer based on the attributes or characteristics of God.

The two main sections of the prayer divide with the words "your" and "our."

1. The first part centers on God, putting God in his rightful place in our priorities. Only by focusing on the patient and loving Father can we find the attitude that puts our own needs in perspective.

2. The second part focuses on our needs—body, soul, and spirit—and the needs of others. In just three brief requests, Jesus targets all of human behavior and character and reminds us that we always need him. It's been said that if these three requests are prayed properly, nothing more need be said. Only in moment-by-moment dependence on God will we experience the good things God wants to provide.

The Lord's Prayer is a dangerous, life-changing prayer. Jesus' enemies eventually killed him for asserting his close tie to God through addressing God as "Father." Until Jesus gave his followers the right to be called children of God, this would have been blasphemy.

Twenty-first-century Christians may take the privilege for granted, but the prayer is still a dangerous one: We do, in one sense, "take our lives in our hands" and offer them up again and again as sacrifice to the One who gave us all in the first place, receiving all of Life in return.

GOD'S ATTRIBUTE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

SCRIPTURE

APPLICATION

Our Father in heaven (NIV)
Our Father which art in heaven (KJV)

GOD'S FATHERLY LOVE

God is a loving and compassionate Father who gives life, provides for and protects those who trust him. Like a caring human father, God wants a close relationship with his children. Addressing God as "Our Father" plunges the person praying into a relationship. A child approaching a loving father knows that father will give careful attention to the child's requests and will be lovingly inclined towards the child's best interests. The child knows the father will answer. This is how Jesus tells us to approach God—as trusting children of a patient, tender father.



But to all who believed him [Jesus] and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

—John 1:12, 13 (New Living Translation)

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God! —1 John 3:1*

*Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence,
so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

—Hebrews 4:16



During Jesus' time, people understood God to be awesome, majestic, and far away in the unreachable heavens. Though the Old Testament uses the metaphor of fatherhood when talking of God, no one would have dreamed of addressing God as "Father" in prayer. Jesus' use of the name "Abba" (like our "Daddy") must have stunned his disciples.

In fact, Jesus' use of the family name was so shocking to the religious leaders of his day that eventually he was accused of blasphemy and crucified for identifying himself as God's Son!

Jesus taught his followers that they should address God as "Father," and that their loving Father would care for all the needs of those who trust in him (see Matthew 7:7-11). Then, not only did Jesus encourage that relationship of trust, but he willingly died a horrible death to purchase the right of believers in Christ to be called children of God! It's hard to comprehend that the God who has all the power in the universe will listen to our prayers because of the actions of his Son, Jesus!

Hallowed be your name (NIV)
Hallowed be thy name (KJV)

GOD'S HOLINESS

To hallow means to make holy. To “hallow” God’s name means to honor it as holy and sacred. When we pray, we enter the presence of God with reverence, worship, and thanksgiving. We thank God not only for what he’s done, but also for who he is. God’s greatness and glory alone are worthy of praise and thankfulness. Thanksgiving recognizes that everything we have belongs to God, whether it be our talents, possessions, jobs, or children.



*Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain,
for the Lord our God is holy.* —Psalm 99:9

*You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not
hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.* —Exodus 20:7

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
—1 Corinthians 10:31

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.
—Psalm 24:1

Traditionally, God’s people, the Jews, never said or wrote the name of God. To do so was considered not keeping the name of God holy. God’s name represents his character, his plan, and his will. We often think of cursing as a common misuse of God’s name, but what about attitudes of the heart? Lack of respect or indifference by one who professes love for God may be just as much a sin. Revelations 3:15, 16 shows God’s attitude toward indifference: “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

Jesus encouraged his followers to use God’s name in honorable ways and for purposes that deepen and endear our bonds to him. Part of showing reverence for the holy name of God is thanking him for who he is and for what he’s done. Many Psalms praise and worship God’s holy name (see Psalms 100 and 148). Our greatest reverence, though, is shown by the stories our lives reveal. Our Father’s name is most hallowed when we live in ways that attract others to him. (See 1 Corinthians 10:31, Matthew 5:16.)

Your kingdom come (NIV)
Thy kingdom come (KJV)

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

God has supreme power and authority over everything in heaven and earth. When we acknowledge God’s sovereignty, we affirm and welcome his reign in our lives. We promise to live in ways that honor him. But God’s kingdom is both here and now—and yet to come. During Jesus’ life on earth, his ministry was “to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, to recover sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18, 19). When Jesus was around, people were freed from sickness, suffering, and pain. When Jesus returns to reign supreme, there will be no pain, suffering, or evil ever again. God will make everything right in the end.

*In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom
that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people.
It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.*
—Daniel 2:44

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men,
and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them
and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or
mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*
—Revelation 21:3, 4

Jesus said that the Kingdom of God was near (Mark 1:15). When asked when the Kingdom of God would come, Jesus said, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.” God’s kingdom will be evident in the lives of those who make him their Lord. This petition asks the Lord to change our lives so that his goodness is always evident through us.

Some people have interpreted this prayer as an invitation to impact culture by passing

laws calling people back to safer moral standards. But Jesus made clear his Church’s mission: to lead people to himself. Jesus commissioned all disciples to proclaim that

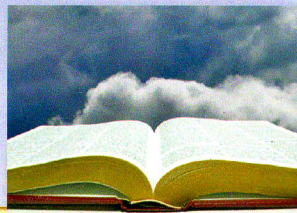


Jesus is King and Lord over all (Matthew 28:18-20). Our obedience to this commission helps spread God’s kingdom throughout the world. This prayer can function as a petition for the strength and power we need to usher in God’s kingdom on earth. When we focus on recognizing and embracing God’s reign in this world, we help to make it visible.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (NIV)
 Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven (KJV)

GOD'S AUTHORITY

God's perfect will is always being done in heaven. But on earth, human free will results in selfishness, greed, and evil. In this part of the Lord's Prayer, we ask that God's will would take place on earth. More specifically, we pray for God's will to become our will. God calls each one of his children to live rightly and do good to others, caring for those around us as much as for ourselves. We pray that all people submit to the will of God over their own desires and faithfully love God and neighbors as themselves. Relationship with God depends on obedience to his will. God's will should be the context for everything we ask for, say, and do.



*Teach me to do your will, for you are my God;
 may your good Spirit lead me on level ground. —Psalm 143:10*

*Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven,
 but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.
 —Matthew 7:21*

Jesus prayed for his Father's will: "Yet not as I will, but as you will." —Matthew 26:39
*For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.
 —Matthew 12:50*

Philippians 2:3-8 says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." Our attitude should be like Jesus'. So often, when we come to God in prayer, we bring our own agendas. We want our will to be done, we want our wishes to be granted, and we want God to answer our prayers in a certain way. Often God's will differs from our own; in these situations, we need to trust God's will over our own desires.

For centuries, Christians have debated whether God's will is done whether or not we pray. Some question, "Why pray if God knows everything we need before we ask?"

Others have wondered whether God takes action at all if we don't initiate the request. While we trust in God's sovereignty and his ability to exercise his good will, we also trust his commands to exercise the muscles of our wills in prayer. We pray, believing in God's promises to respond in ways that are best for us (see Luke 18:1). Though we often pray for changes in circumstance, the real work of prayer changes us from the inside out (Romans 12:1, 2). The more we talk with God, the more we find ourselves wanting to please him. Prayer often changes our circumstances, but more importantly, it changes us and our priorities.

Give us this day our daily bread (NIV)
 Give us this day our daily bread (KJV)

GOD'S PROVIDENCE

God is able to provide for all our needs. The Greek word for "bread" represents not just food, but every physical thing we need. When we pray for our daily bread, we ask God to provide for our material, physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual needs for that day. Daily bread can include the daily needs of ministries, people, communities, leaders, family, friends, as well as personal needs. God commits himself to provide for his children, yet God knows more about what we need than we ourselves know. By praying for daily bread, we are not taking it for granted, but acknowledging that all our life depends on his mercy.



*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.
 Each day has enough trouble of its own. —Matthew 6:33, 34*

*Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry,
 and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." —John 6:35*

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. —James 1:17

The phrase "this day" shows that we rely on God one day at a time. Compared to the rest of people on earth, we are wealthy Christians. It's far too easy for us to forget that not only our talents, resources, and opportunities come from God, but also the next meal. Asking for what we need each day—even if it's already in our refrigerators—encourages a relationship with the One who gives all. He wants us to come to him not only with our big requests, but with our everyday requests as well. He wants us to remember and ask for his help with the most basic needs:



disciplining our children, speaking to a spouse, growing spiritually, resolving a conflict with a friend, reuniting with family members, leading ministries, conducting an office meeting, and going to the movies.

So what if we ask for the wrong things—things that, while they may be good in themselves are not in God's plan for us? As a loving Father, God will always give us what's best for us, not necessarily what we want. What we receive will be what's right for us and fits God's greater goal of transforming us to be more like him.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Rather than giving us a formula to repeat over and over, Jesus gave us a model prayer illustrating first of all what our relationship with God should be like (the total dependence of children on a loving Father), and also the three main purposes of prayer:

- To declare God's holiness
- To usher in God's kingdom
- To do God's will

Seven distinct parts emphasize seven of God's attributes that help to place all of our needs and desires in proper perspective.

GOD'S ATTRIBUTE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

SCRIPTURE

APPLICATION

	GOD'S ATTRIBUTE	FOCUS	PETITION
1	God's Love	God is a loving Father	<i>Our Father in heaven</i>
2	God's Holiness	God's name is holy	<i>Hallowed be your name</i>
3	God's Sovereignty	There is no one above God	<i>Your kingdom come</i>
4	God's Authority	God has the supreme authority	<i>Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven</i>
5	God's Providence	God is the source of everything we need	<i>Give us today our daily bread</i>
6	God's Mercy	Forgiveness is our greatest need	<i>Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors</i>
7	God's Protection	Trials prove our faith and develop our characters	<i>And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one</i>



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Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors (NIV)
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors (KJV)

GOD'S MERCY

We ask God to forgive the wrong we have done as well as our neglect of the good things we should have done. But there is a catch: God will forgive us only as much as we forgive those who have injured us. God is merciful and he expects us to be also. If we refuse to forgive others, how can we expect God's forgiveness?

Debts vs. Trespasses

Several Greek words are used to describe sin. The Lord's prayer in the Gospel of Matthew uses the word *ophelema* which is rendered "debt" (Matthew 6:12). However, only two verses later, the gospel uses the word *paraptoma*, which is usually rendered "trespass" (Matthew 6:14). In all these cases, sin is what separates us from God, our friends, and our family. Without forgiveness—whether it be forgiving debts or forgiving trespasses—relationships suffer and redemption is not possible.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. —1 John 1:9

*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
—Psalm 103:12, 13*

No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. —Hebrews 8:11, 12

The New Testament uses five Greek words to talk about sin. The meanings range from slipping and falling (unintentional), "missing the mark" as an arrow misses the target, stepping across the line (intentional), "lawlessness" or open rebellion against God, and the word used in Matthew 6:12, which refers to a spiritual debt to God. This last aspect of sin is what Jesus illustrates in the following story:

Jesus told a parable about a man who owed the king over one million dollars. After the man begged for mercy, the king forgave the debt. Afterward, that same man demanded a few dollars from his neighbor. When his neighbor could not pay, the man had him thrown into prison. Once the king heard

about it, he had the man turned over to the jailers until he could repay the debt. Jesus finished by saying, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart" (Matthew 18:23-35). Jesus makes it clear that God will not show mercy to the merciless!

Sometimes we are unaware of our sins. Therefore, praying for forgiveness requires listening quietly in God's presence so that he may reveal to us our own acts of disobedience, our resentments, and our unresolved issues. Though as Christians we inevitably continue to sin, our lives ought to be characterized by a decreasing frequency of sin and an increased sensitivity to it.

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one (NIV)
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (KJV)

GOD'S PROTECTION

We are taught to pray that we won't be tempted to do wrong. In a practical way, this is like praying that God will keep our minds off of tempting situations. People used to excuse bad behavior by saying, "The devil made me do it." But in reality, the devil cannot make us do wrong. We do it ourselves. God won't make us obey him, but he does give us the power to walk away from wrong choices. The Holy Spirit gives us strength to withstand temptation, avoid sin, and strive for holiness. Satan is constantly seeking to attack the hearts and minds of those who love God. God provides us with the defenses we need to protect ourselves against the weapons of Satan. By praying for protection, we prepare each day for battle against evil.

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. —1 Corinthians 10:13

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground. —Ephesians 6:10-13a

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. —1 Peter 1:6, 7

The Greek word for "temptation" emphasizes the idea of testing or proving, rather than simply an enticement to sin. The Bible is clear that God is good and holy, and he would never lead us into sin. James 1:13, 14 says that God does not tempt anyone, but each person is tempted by his own evil desire. So why do we pray this petition? Because it's better to avoid danger and all the trouble caused by sin than to have to fight and face the possibility of losing to it! Realistically, having the potential to do evil is part of being a human being—it gives us the opportunity to show what we are becoming. Genuine freedom requires that there be a choice between good and evil.

Yet, we also know that trials strengthen faith and character (1 Peter 1:6, 7). Through our trials, we are driven closer to God through prayer and Scripture. We are reminded not to place our trust in ourselves. Through trials, we learn to trust God more, and we gain the ability to help others in similar trials. So while human nature resists the realities of trials and temptations, the maturing Christian accepts the refining process they bring. All that's left is to throw ourselves on the Father who has promised not to leave us unprotected and exposed to attacks from the enemy (Satan), but to protect, deliver, and forgive.

REASONS TO FORGIVE

Reason	Result	Bible Passage
Forgiveness is characteristic of a Christian life.	By loving our enemies, we show that we are children of God.	Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. —Matthew 5:7
	When a Christian refuses to forgive, that person puts himself above God as judge.	You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. —Matthew 5: 43-45
We follow Jesus, our role model, who forgave.	Only through Jesus are we forgiven and made right with God.	Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. —Ephesians 4:32 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. —1 John 2:6
	Whatever we may suffer cannot come close to the offenses Jesus Christ forgave during his time on earth.	Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." —Luke 23:34
We are made in the image of God, who forgives.	We reflect the beauty and glory of our Creator when we forgive.	A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense. —Proverbs 19:11
Forgiveness keeps Satan from gaining a foothold.	Forgiveness frees the conscience of guilt and brings peace of mind.	If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes. —2 Corinthians 2:10, 11
Christ's Body, the Church, cannot function without forgiveness.	Grudges and resentments tarnish the Church's witness and prevent the full benefits of God's gifts.	Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. —Matthew 5:23, 24
Only by forgiving others can we expect our own prayers for forgiveness to be answered.	God will treat us in the same way we treat others.	For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. —Matthew 6:14, 15

OTHER VERSES ON PRAYER

Abide in Christ

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. —John 15:7

Ask, Seek and Knock

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. —Matthew 7:7, 8

Do Not Be Anxious

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. —Philippians 4:6, 7

Pray Continually

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. —1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

God Knows What We Need

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. —Romans 8:26, 27

Prayer is Effective

Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. —James 5:13-16

HOW CAN I PRAY?

- How can I pray "our" if I live only for myself?
- How can I pray "Father" if I do not act like his child?
- How can I pray "who art in heaven" if I am laying up no treasure there?
- How can I pray "hallowed be Thy name" if I don't care about being holy myself?
- How can I pray "Thy kingdom come" if I live for my kingdom, power, and wealth?
- How can I pray "Thy will be done" if I disobey his Word?
- How can I pray "on earth as it is in heaven" if I will not serve him here and now?
- How can I pray "give us...our daily bread" if I am dishonest or unwilling to share what I have with others?
- How can I pray "forgive us our debts" if I nurture resentment against another?
- How can I pray "lead us not into temptation" if I willingly place myself in its path?
- How can I pray "deliver us from evil" if I refuse to put on all of God's armor?
- How can I pray "Thine is the kingdom" if my life does not reflect his lordship?
- How can I pray "Thine is the...power" if I fear what people may do?
- How can I pray "Thine is the...glory" if I seek honor for myself?
- How can I pray "forever" if my life is bounded only by the things of time?

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