

# The Genius of Prayer

a sermon in the series  
Sermon on the Mount

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## Matthew 6:9-13

*In this manner, therefore, 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 this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer is the most famous prayer in all of the Word of God. However, Jesus could not have prayed this prayer, at least not in its entirety, because of the words, "forgive us our debts." He was absolutely sinless and had no debt to ask God to forgive. In reaction to that, some have renamed this prayer *The Model Prayer*.

According to certain people, who have taken this prayer and divided it into sections as an outline for proper praying, you are supposed to pray in line with divisions set up in this model prayer. One model says prayer begins with worship,

*"Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

Then they say the Lord moves us into petition,

*"Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts . . . and do not lead us into temptation."*

The prayer time is ended with thanksgiving,

*"For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."*

The most famous outline from the Lord's Prayer is ACTS—adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. These are little tricks and tools people believe Jesus gives to produce a rough outline of what your prayers ought to be in your private time with Him. But I don't see this in the prayer.

I reject calling it a model prayer or even the *Lord's Prayer*. It doesn't suit the context of what Jesus does in this sermon, which is an exposition on the state of true Christianity. It is showing us who God's people are versus those who are not. Jesus deconstructs the Pharisees and their institutionalized religion as outside the kingdom. Jesus remarkably goes through this sermon distinguishing what a true Christian is. He shows me what I ought to be, if I am truly saved, by showing what I ought not be—a religious hypocrite. Hypocrites do many of the right things, but don't have the heart of Jesus.

In this prayer Jesus restores the purpose of prayer. Let me give you the background. Jesus began this sixth chapter talking about prayer by sharing how the Pharisees prayed and why they prayed. They look for street corners and synagogues where people are congregated to pray their prayers publically and be heard. They did this so people would think them great men of God. It was a matter of personal gain. In this case—their reputations benefited.

Jesus says don't pray this way. You are not to pray publically so people can look at you and say "Wow, he is a holy person." Jesus also cites pagan prayers whose emphasis was on using the right words and plenty of words, thinking the more they prayed the better the chances of getting their prayers answered.

These are the basic two reasons people prayed in that day and I suggest to you they are the top two reasons most people pray today. The majority of prayers prayed in public worship services are for people to hear and say, "That was a beautiful prayer; he must be a man that walks with God. He knows how to pray, he must be very spiritual." That's not the purpose of prayer. Nor should we think because we use the right words we are effectively praying. This is one of the reasons why I reject the theory that Jesus is trying to teach us to pray by using an outline here. You pray about this, then you pray about this, thirdly you pray about this, and you better not get them out of order because then your prayer won't be right. If He was doing that, He'd be doing exactly what He criticizes in verse seven.

Jesus is restoring the real reason why we ought to pray. Prayer is not for you to impress God, nor is it because God needs to hear from you because He's lonely. But for many these are what prayer is about. They think if they don't talk to Him, His feelings are going to be hurt. A lot of people really believe that and say, "I've got to pray today because if I don't pray, then God will be upset with me and He won't bless my life." That is not the purpose of prayer. The Lord does not need you to inform Him of your needs. Look at what He says in verse eight, "Therefore do not be like them," like the heathen that is, "for your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him." God created the supply before He ever created the need. He already knows what you need because He's already created the supply. The Bible is absolutely clear about the foreknowledge of God, He knows all things—He knows the end from the beginning.

The purpose of prayer is that I need to pray. Prayer is for my benefit, not the Father's. God made us to need to express ourselves to Him in order to be satisfied in Him. It's the same as marriage. Husbands, God made your bride with a need to express her heart to you, and she's satisfied in

that expression when you listen. God has so wired all of us in this same way; we need to talk to God, we were made for it.

Jesus restores the purpose of prayer. He rejects the formality of religion and the heathen view of prayer. The pagan's view of worship is very superstitious. You must say the right incantation, the right words. In contrast, Jesus says prayer is to be God-centered, not word-centered. I have a need for God and therefore my soul must be fixed, anchored, and centered in God. Prayer is His way to remind me of my need for Him. The man that does not pray is confessing to all he doesn't need God; he's self-sufficient and can pull himself up by his own bootstraps. Why pray? He's his own god, savior, and redeemer. He doesn't need prayer; he's got everything under control.

What is true spirituality in the first place? Feeding the poor? Going to church? Teaching Sunday school lessons? Singing worship songs? Being kind to neighbors? Or is it praying prayers? None of these things are true spirituality!

True spirituality is to have your soul anchored in God so that He becomes the ballast of your life. Do you know what a ballast is in a boat? They put weights in the very bottom of a sailboat to keep it upright in the water. God is our ballast. He is to be so weighty in my life that He keeps me centered, balanced, and afloat. That's what prayer does—it keeps me God-centered.

Listen to the way we often pray, "I," "me," "my," "I need this," "I need that," "Lord, please do this for me." In Luke 18:11-12 Jesus shows us a kind of prayer that describes a lot of praying today. "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'"

Not only is prayer centered on our petitions but that is all prayer has become, a time to rattle off your want-list. There is nothing wrong in making petitions, but when I petition God, He is to be the center, the aim of my petition and not my need. God has created your needs so that you would run to Him for the fulfillment and satisfaction of those needs for one reason, so that He can be your center of gravity instead of you.

I believe that even all the things I still struggle with, the temptation and tendency of my fallen flesh, God has uniquely tailored them to me. He made me, didn't He? Not only did He make my physical appearance but also my talents and abilities. But did He stop there? No, I believe that even the sinful tendencies of my flesh, God either allowed or created. I don't care what word you use, or what theologian finds fault with me; I still believe that I am fearfully and wonderfully made, which includes weaknesses. It is those weaknesses that keep me desperately dependent upon God.

I'm not saying God is the Author of sin; the Bible flatly rejects that and says the complete opposite. But you are a fallen creature. You fell as a result of Adam and Eve's sin. Your nature is fallen. Thus, when God shaped you in your mother's womb, He took the natural corruptness of your

being and He fashioned it. The very temptations and struggles with your flesh are not there to drive you away from God. Rather they are there to drive you to Him. God uses your natural inclinations and weaknesses to create within you a heart reality, a belief that goes beyond head-knowledge that you do need God; without which you will utterly and totally fall.

The very things that we wish we were not there work to our good by the grace of God. This only proves He is what we need. Do you think you'd live a better Christian life if you didn't have those temptations, struggles or enticements? Most of us do. But they're there to keep you desperately dependant on the Lord. Your heavenly Father says to you, "I'm to be so weighty and powerful in your life that those things will drive you to Me. I permit them to remain to show you your need for Me, and it is your need for Me that causes you to cling to Me desperately. I'll get you through the temptations. Depend upon Me!" That's why when you pray about these things, God has to be the center, and not you. If you focus on yourself and your weaknesses instead of God, then there is no substantial weight to counterbalance your vessel. You will eventually capsize.

Let me direct your attention to the general construction of this prayer. All of man's needs are listed in this prayer. Verse eight is the context, "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him." Therefore because God knows what you need before you ask Him, Jesus is showing how we ought to pray and what the real needs are. As you run through this little prayer, of just a few sentences, you'll say, "Well, I don't see all of my needs listed there." But they're there. What you think is your need may not really be a need. Let's go through this entire prayer.

The first need He begins with is relationship with God, "*Our Father in heaven.*" That, my friend, is your number one need. I could spend the rest of our time and probably another sermon just on the words, "*Our Father in heaven.*" But I will limit myself to say only two things about it. First, see how tender God is in this statement, "our Father." Some of you don't relate to the term 'father' or the concept of the fatherhood of God because of your earthly father. Let me help you. Your heavenly Father is ten trillion times better than the best dad on this earth. Your earthly father is not worthy to be compared to God. The Father above is not evil and He's never done wrong towards you, nor will He. He's a tender Father.

Second, He's also above us all, "*Our Father in heaven*" Many people ask this question, "Who should I pray to, God the Father or Jesus?" Let Jesus answer this question. John 16:23, Jesus says, "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly I say to you whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you." Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, "*Our Father in heaven.*" Why? Because of what Jesus did on the cross—God is now your Father also. You can talk to Him as your dad. That's a need; I need a relationship with God as Father and son.

My second need is to worship God, "*Hallowed be Thy name.*" You're made to worship and you do worship. Some worship the latest celebrity, home, status, reputation, or recreation. Some of you worship yourselves. That's the idolatry that we're all guilty of, we ultimately worship ourselves.

“Hallowed be *Thy* name.” You were made to worship Him and therefore in order to be satisfied you ought to revere God as the most significant person in your life. That’s why Christians who backslide are unfulfilled and miserable—God is not their ballast, the center of their gravity. He is not the most important person in their life; their world is revolving around themselves rather than Christ. Dear sinner friend, that’s why your life can never achieve what you hoped. It has and will always elude you. It doesn’t matter how old you are; if you aren’t a Christian, you’re always hoping for something better. There is this idea, you probably can’t define it for me, but it’s in the mind nonetheless, it’s in the soul deeply embedded, this craving for something you’ve never had. You sometimes think you get close to if not get it, but as soon as you get what you thought you wanted, it’s gone like a vapor. You were made for God, to worship Him, and therefore nothing else will satisfy.

Third, the rule of God is needed, “*Your kingdom come.*” Where is the kingdom of God? Wherever God is allowed to rule. We need the rule of God, and fourth, we also need the will of God, “*Your will be done in earth as it is in heaven.*” Not only do I need God’s authority in my life, I need to know what He wants from me.

Fifth, we also need the personal, physical provision He gives, “*Give us this day our daily bread.*” This would encompass all of our physical, basic needs for survival. You are to ask God for those things. Here we see petition is appropriate. He does not say in verses six and seven that you should never ask for anything. No, not at all, but He is calling attention to the way you ask and the reason you ask.

Our sixth basic need is for personal forgiveness, “*Forgive us our debts.*” The fact that I am redeemed does not mean I don’t have the capacity to sin. Only in heaven is that capacity removed, therefore I still need forgiveness.

Seventh, you and I need personal mercy to forgive others, “*As we forgive our debtors.*” Our world is fallen and is occupied with fallen people who sin. Sometimes they sin against you and me, and we need personal mercy to forgive them.

Eighth, we need personal holiness, “*Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil.*” Holy people are the happiest people. A sincere believer who is walking according to the scripture is a most joyful, fulfilled, and happy person.

Ninth, you and I need personal acknowledgement of the sovereignty of God, “*For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*” Why do I need to personally acknowledge the sovereignty of God? My first answer may seem too obvious, but sometimes it is so obvious we forget it. It is because He is God. We need to acknowledge and bow down to His authority. Second, there are things in this life I cannot explain. The only peace that will assure my heart in the hour of difficulty is the sovereignty of God. When life hurls at us questions that defy human logic, we need to acknowledge God knows and has everything under His benevolent control.

Lastly, I want to direct your attention and spend the remainder of our time on the nature of the petitions we find in this sermon. They are all petitions for God's glory. This prayer contains six petitions and they're divided into two halves. In the first half, Jesus tells us to pray that God will glorify His name. "*Our Father, hallowed be Your name.*" "Hallowed be Your name" is a petition which is nothing more than requesting God would make His name great. Secondly, "*Your kingdom come*" is as we have already said is a petition for God to establish His rule. In this chaotic world of sin and futility, Lord, bring Your rule to bear. Let Thy throne of truth and peace purify the earth. The last petition in the first half is, "*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" The prayer is, "Lord, as the angels in heaven obey you, so let men obey you on this earth."

These three petitions are heavy, full of truth to anchor your life. This, I pray you see, is why I say Jesus is restoring prayer to its proper place in our lives. Prayer is not about impressing people, nor is it about getting things from God, it's about God. If my life is God-centered, anchored in God, my great concern will be God's glory. Friend, if God's glory is not your preoccupation and passion, I suggest to you as graciously as I can, that your life is not in proper order. We are here for God's glory, not ours. We are created and saved by the blood of Jesus so we can be reunited with the purpose for which we were made—the glory of God. Your greatest need is not just to escape hell, for even your escape of hell is for God's glory, not just your comfort.

So, Jesus is saying don't pray like the Pharisee, who prays prayers that are all about himself.

Prayer is to be about God and His glory. If we would return to the glory of God as being the purpose for why we exist, live, and breathe, then our lives would come in sync with what we were designed for, and we would be satisfied.

In the last three petitions, Jesus tells us to pray that we will glorify God's name. God is sovereign, doing anything He desires, but He chooses not to do some things without involving individuals. There is a responsibility you and I must fulfill. We need the work of God's glory in our small, ordinary lives and we are to pray that in our small, ordinary lives God's glory will be seen.

Let me show you how you do that. First, you glorify God by trusting God to provide for your physical needs, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" To sincerely pray this I admit that I'm not able to supply everything I or my family needs. Some might say, "Pastor, wait a minute, you work, I work. I get a paycheck, I'm capable." Sir, how is it that you're able to rise out of your bed and go to a job and perform those tasks? You're only able by the grace and the mercy of God. So when we pray, "Give me this day my daily bread," we say, "Lord, here is my need, here is my family's need. I am acknowledging I have certain inabilities and limitations but You have all ability." Acknowledge your need for God's supply, that's how you glorify God, because as God supplies your need He is magnified.

God's glory will be seen, second, by acknowledging your sin and forgiving the sins of others, "*forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.*" Here you are acknowledging your need for forgiveness. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). This

week, it is safe to say, every one of us have sinned at least once. I only wish it was once. I don't need to act like I didn't sin or that it's not a problem, I need to acknowledge it. When I acknowledge my sin God is glorified because He is seen as merciful, forgiving me of my sin.

Third, we glorify God by praying to live a holy life, "*do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*" To acknowledge that without God you can't be holy glorifies God as being faithful and gracious. Not only must you acknowledge your sins, but also your sinfulness. I need to believe and confess I am not capable of walking in perfect holiness without God's help. There are still flaws and weaknesses about me that keep me from being absolutely conformed to His image. I need the grace of God.

Who am I to think I can live for God? Who am I to believe that I am capable of pleasing this infinite, omnipotent, omniscient God? Who am I to think I can walk like Jesus on this earth? Who are you to think you can do that? We can't and we ought not to think we can. We need to acknowledge God and say, "Lord, protect me from the evil one. You keep me from the hour of temptation. And if Your will requires I be tempted, then I know You will provide a way of escape, for you have promised You'll not allow me to be tempted beyond what I am able."

These are our needs and these six things do the first—they make God's name great. This is the genius of this prayer. The beauty of this prayer is it is God-centered. My life is to flow into God-centeredness, and He should be glorified in me so that His name will be made great as I seek Him in these crucial areas. We spend too much time asking God, "What do You want me to do?" If we would just be more God-focused, if we would be more taken by His beauty and greatness it would become very obvious what we're supposed to do.

I confess to you that one of my inadequacies in my prayer life has been spending way too much time asking God for direction instead of just beholding His perfection. I would suggest that is what Jesus is trying to teach us here. Prayer is not about getting your needs met for the sake of the needs. He already knows what you need, and He's a good Father who loves us. Nor is prayer about impressing yourself because you pray at least thirty minutes a day and read your Bible. No, prayer is about getting your heart God-centered, anchored in Him for that day by beholding Him. Let us focus on His the greatness of His name and establish His kingdom in our lives. By glorifying Him in your neediness, you show He is great and merciful.

I realize this is a message that several of you couldn't glean anything because you don't think it was suited to you. You don't think God to be great, He is not important to you. You don't think about Him or His greatness, much less, pray about it. My dear friend, that's the problem. The problem is not the particular sins you're involved in. It is not about cheating, profanity, tobacco, alcohol, drugs, sex, money, or fame. None of these things or any other sin is the real problem. The real problem is you have no anchor, no center for your life that is stable and weighty enough to keep your life afloat. You're not able to do that. Your sins capture you simply because they are the things you turn to in the absence of God.

You're in the same boat as I am; I'm not big enough, heavy enough, or important enough to revolve my world around me. I wasn't made for that, I was made to revolve around Christ. That's what Jesus is trying to say to you—you need Jesus at the center. You need God as a Father, you need to know Him as a Father, and you need to seek His greatness. In seeking His greatness, you find not only His glory, but also your glory. Amen.