

Matthew 6:9-15

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The Lord's Prayer: *Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray. They are to pray to their Father with all due honor, seeking to accomplish His will, acknowledging their dependence on Him to meet their physical and spiritual needs. They are to pray for God to show them mercy in exactly the way they show mercy to others.*

The parallel account of this teaching is found in Mark 11:25-26 and Luke 11:2-4.

Jesus has taught His disciples about two types of prayer they should avoid. He warned them not to pray foolishly, like self-righteous hypocrites in public places who seek honor from men. He also warned them not to praying mindlessly, like the Gentiles who have no relationship with their gods and repeat meaningless words unsure if they will be heard. Now, Jesus shows His disciples how they should pray, to *Pray in the way* he will teach them.

The prayer Jesus prays is not a script. It is a model. It is a manner or *a way to pray*. It is a perspective and posture for His disciples to have as they speak from their hearts with their *Father*. It is also another chiasm.

Chiasms were a common format Jews used to express their thoughts. Chiasms are a pattern of statements that mirror each other from the outside to the inside. They follow an A-B-C...C'-B'-A' format. The central idea of a chiasm is located in its center.

The chiastic structure of what is commonly referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer” or “The Model Prayer” is as follows:

- A. Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name.
- B. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.
- C. Give us this day our daily bread.
- D. And forgive us our debts,
- D'. as we also have forgiven our debtors.
- C'. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
- B'. For Yours is the kingdom
- A'. and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

The A and A' phrases mirror one another, as do the B and B' phrases, the C and C' phrases, and the D and D' phrases. The central concept is in the D and D' phrases, and concerns mercy and confession. It is a prayer for God to treat us the same way we treat others. When we pray this model prayer, we confess the second great commandment, to treat others as we desire to be treated. That we show others mercy and *forgive* them because we want to be *forgiven*. After the prayer ends with an "Amen," Jesus explains the prayer's central concept in verses 14-15. The fact that He explains this would indicate that He realizes there might be some confusion as to why the main part of the prayer is confession and a request for mercy, to *forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors*. Jesus explains the main point in verses 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.

It makes sense that Jesus would explain this primary point, because it is not natural for us to ask God to "Please treat me like I treat others." Our human nature typically leads us to ask for special treatment. We can easily rationalize our behavior (they deserve it) while asking for mercy (I deserve it). But God makes clear this is not the path He desires for us to follow. God will give us the same amount of mercy we grant others. Accordingly, the Lord's Prayer contains an attitude adjustment. We can't really pray it without first addressing bitterness or anger toward others. Otherwise we would be making a false confession.

This central provision of the model prayer reflects the two great commandments (Matthew 22:37-40). It reflects the second great commandment to treat others as we want to be treated, and remove all barriers to fellowship with them. And it also reflects the first great commandment to love God with all our hearts by asking God for mercy to be forgiven for our own faults, that we might walk in daily fellowship with Him.

Jesus's prayer begins, *Our Father who is in heaven*. Throughout the delivery of His kingdom platform in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes God to His disciples as *Father*. This term depicts God as a loving authority figure with whom we share a close, familial relationship. The partnership and intimacy between Jesus's disciples and God their *Father* is very close, even as the apparent divide between His throne *in heaven* and their situation on earth might have seemed like a metaphysical gulf.

Speaking of and to *our Father who is in heaven*, Jesus adds *Hallowed be Your name*. This completes the A thought in the chiasm, and corresponds with the A' phrase that God is *the power and glory forever*. Matthew uses a passive form of the Greek verb, "Hagiazo" (G37) that is translated as "Hallowed." This word is often translated as "sanctify" or in its noun and adjective forms as "holy." Here Jesus means that God's *name* and reputation should be "set apart," "be distinguished," "be highly honored and respected." When we think of our heavenly Father, we shouldn't think of Him as 'some guy,' or a cosmic vending machine, or perhaps a petty tyrant who must be appeased. We are to hallow His *name* and recognize Him for Who He is—the Creator and all-powerful King of the Universe. All *power and glory* belongs to Him *forever*. This attitude reflects the first and greatest commandment, to love the Lord God with all our being.

Jesus then prays for *Your kingdom to come*. “*Your*” refers to our Heavenly *Father*. The *kingdom* is the *kingdom* that John (the Baptizer) and Christ were preaching. This *kingdom* was now at hand (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). It is the *kingdom* Jesus has been proclaiming throughout this sermon (Matthew 5:3, 5:10, 5:19, 5:20, 5:34, 5:35, 6:10, 6:13, 6:33, 7:21). It is a *kingdom* that is not of this world (John 18:36).

Jesus’ audience, His disciples, would likely have understood the prayer to include a petition for the Messianic *Kingdom* to come to Israel. The Old Testament prophesied the Messiah would reign on the throne of David forever (2 Samuel 7:7-18). This Old Testament prophecy is confirmed in the New Testament (Acts 13:22-39). The New Testament books were written after Jesus died, resurrected, and ascended to Heaven. They contain an expanded revelation on this point. Not only will Jesus reign over Israel on the Throne of David (2 Samuel 7:13), there will be a new heaven and new earth, and God will come down to earth to live among men and reign over all the earth (Revelation 21:1-4). When heaven comes to earth, God’s *will* will be *done on earth*, and heaven will have come to earth.

After Jesus rose from the dead, His disciples asked Him, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Perhaps they had been praying as they were taught, and now wanted to know if Jesus was ready to have His *kingdom come* in physical form, by restoring the *kingdom* to Israel. Jesus let His disciples know there was a bigger plan, that would require special spiritual power. But Jesus did not tell His disciples there would be no *kingdom*. Rather, Jesus replied in Acts 1:7 that it was not for them to know when the *kingdom* would be restored to Israel. Jesus clearly confirmed that the *kingdom* would be physically restored, but at an undisclosed time.

The reality of God’s *kingdom* is comprehensive and absolute. Paradoxically, its felt presence (both when Jesus prayed this with His disciples and now) was and is not fully apparent or comprehended. When we pray as Jesus teaches, and we pray *Your kingdom come*, we can understand we are asking that God’s *kingdom* fill the world with its goodness, take full residence on earth, and become visible and obvious to all. We are asking, “May we live in the harmony that You intended from the beginning.” Jesus’s instruction is for us to request not only for God to make His *kingdom* known, but also a request to help His disciples get into reality that God is on His cosmic throne. When connected with the main point, to live with an attitude of forgiving harmony and service to others, it can be seen as a petition to give us grace to have His spiritual *kingdom* flow through our lives into this physical world.

God’s *kingdom* prevails. Christ’s followers need to recognize this truth and act accordingly. The fact that Judea is a client state of Rome is irrelevant. The fact that injustice, oppression, and tyranny are the visible and social norms is beside the point. Theirs (and our) reward does not come from those dying and backward kingdoms. It comes from our *Father*, the King of all that was and is and is to come.

Jesus then prays *Your (Our Father’s) will be done, On earth as it is in heaven*. This is the B phrase in the chiasm and corresponds to the B’ phrase *For Yours is the kingdom*.

Heaven is a place where God's *will is done*. In *heaven* God's *will is done* perfectly and without any exception. The situation *on earth* is noticeably and sadly different. This is a result of the Fall (Genesis 3). When Jesus's followers walk in obedience, they are bringing *heaven* to *earth* in the sense that *heaven* is a place where God's *will is done*.

Christ came to *earth* as a man to do what Adam failed to do, which was to live in submission to God as a man. Christ came to *earth* as God to restore humanity, that they might rule over the *earth* in harmony with God, nature, and one another as they were designed to do (Psalm 8; Hebrews 2:5-12). His dual purposes of submission and restoration made the *earth* His *kingdom* not only as God, but also as man (Philippians 2:5-11, Revelation 3:21). When He came, the Messiah proclaimed and invited people to repent and abandon the pride and error of their ways, which leads to death, and reunite with Him, to be restored to their life's destiny of co-ruling with Him in His everlasting *kingdom*. To accept the fullness of Christ's offer, one must believe Jesus was God (John 20:31) and follow His *will on earth* (2 Corinthians 5:9-10). His *will* is this: love God and live in obedience to Jesus, following His example. Jesus laid down His life to serve others (Mark 8:34-38, Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 2:5-8; Revelation 2:26, 3:21).

After praying for God's *kingdom to come* and His *will to be done on earth* the same way it is *done in Heaven*, Jesus acknowledges man's physical dependence upon God. He prays *Give us this day our daily bread*. As physical creatures we need physical nourishment to sustain the life of our bodies. Our bodies need food regularly (*daily*) to function properly. Any person who tries to go without food for an extended period of time is humbled by hunger. Even though we may suppose that the food we eat is of our own hands, all things ultimately come from God. God, in His grace, created a world with good things for us to eat and sustain ourselves. James writes "every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, from the Father of lights" (James 1:17).

By asking God to *Give (to) us this day, our daily bread* the petitioner is confessing their physical dependence upon *our Father*. After acknowledging *Our Father who is in heaven* and having *Hallowed His name*, Jesus instructs His followers to ask God to fulfill their physical needs. This is not demanding of God. It is requesting. It is a recognition of dependence. Christ teaches His disciples to express dependence and ask for fulfillment of their most basic needs. The human tendency is to consider all we have as a given, then ask for more. By focusing on a basic daily need, the petitioner places themselves in a frame of mind to be grateful for merely having enough to eat *this day*.

The fact that Jesus includes the phrase *this day* highlights that we should come to God often. We can and ought to come to God as often as we have need, which is at a minimum *daily*. The focus on *daily* also shapes a perspective that focuses upon the present. Due to the limitations God granted humans, the past can be learned from but not altered. The future cannot be acted upon. The impact of our choices can only be made in the present. Jesus will give this perspective practical application in verse 34, when He will tell His disciples to "not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Bread was a staple food throughout most of the ancient world, including Judea. In an agricultural society, Jewish life intimately revolved around the process of making *bread*. Many of Jesus's

parables draw upon this fact to communicate His message. Every Jew would have been acquainted, if not directly involved, in some portion of its production—the tilling of soil, the sowing of seeds, the reaping of the harvest, the thrashing and milling of grains, the making and kneading of dough, the adding of yeast, and finally the baking of *bread*. *Bread* was likely consumed by everyone virtually every *day* of their lives, so it might serve as a symbol for all that is needed for basic survival.

For the Jew, *bread* also had ceremonial significance. The Passover meal consisted of unleavened *bread*. The lack of yeast signified the children of Israel’s readiness to depart Egypt—they did not wait for the bread to rise. Also, during their forty years in the wilderness, God provided manna (a *bread*-like substance) from *heaven daily* to keep His children alive. Moses told Israel that God allowed them to be hungry so that they would learn to depend on Him (Deuteronomy 8:3). This prayer is being taught by Jesus—the *Bread* of life (John 6:35) who was born in Bethlehem (“The House of *Bread*”). In addition to humbly submitting to the reality of our dependence on our *Father in heaven to give us this day our daily bread*, Jesus also tells His followers to acknowledge their spiritual dependence. This is the C phrase in the chiasm, and reflects the C’ phrase that recognizes our spiritual dependence: *And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil*.

And now Jesus arrives at the heart of His chiastic model prayer. The first half of this centerpiece is *forgive us our debts*. Even though Jesus personally was without sin, the main thing He wants His disciples to acknowledge and ask of God is for forgiveness. It is a request for mercy, yes, but we cannot grasp its full meaning until we couple it with the phrase that follows, *as we also have forgiven our debtors*. This is a prayer for God to treat us the same way we treat others. We show others mercy and we *forgive* them because *we also* want to be *forgiven*.

Mercy for the merciful is a recurring theme throughout Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount.

It was the central thought of the Makarios chiasm (“Blessed are...”) in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (Matthew 5:7).

It shows up again when Jesus teaches about the log in your own eye “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:2).

And it is crystalized in the Golden Rule, “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

And in case the main point of the prayer was missed, Jesus explicitly reinforces the mercy principle immediately following His prayer. *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* (Matthew 6:14-15). Notice: Jesus states this positively *if you forgive others* God *will also forgive you*; and He states this negatively *if you do not forgive others*, God *will not forgive* you.

The mercy principle is this: We do not only *forgive others* because we have been *forgiven*, but *we also forgive others* because we want to be *forgiven*. This raises a question. Because Jesus is

teaching this to His disciples, those who already believe in Him, why do they still need to be forgiven? The New Testament teaches that Jesus paid for sins once for all (Romans 6:5-11). So why is there a need for ongoing forgiveness? Jesus is speaking here of ongoing relational fellowship. A husband and wife only need to be married once. Future behavior does not alter the reality of the marriage. However, for the husband and wife to have harmony, they must forgive each other many times throughout their marriage.

The core of the Model Prayer teaches us that God's ongoing relational harmony with us is determined by the manner in which we treat others. It might be like a parent that takes a cookie from their child because they took a cookie from another child, to teach them a lesson ("this is what that feels like"). It also might be that our capacity to relate to God is directly affected by how we treat others. For example, if we are bitter toward others, it might reduce our ability to relate to God, perhaps because we are focused on how we've been treated unfairly. This moves us away from fellowship with God, since He forgives us for our mistakes. So Jesus instructs His disciples to choose to forgive, rather than dwell on offenses.

It is worth reflection that in the centerpiece of the model prayer, Jesus teaches His disciples to ask for God to treat them as they treat others. Most particularly, that they ask God to only forgive them to the extent they forgive others. It seems clear that forgiving others is a prerequisite to entering God's presence in prayer in the manner Jesus prescribes.

This also raises the question, "What does Jesus mean when He tells us to forgive others?" Does it mean we never contradict, challenge, or oppose anyone? This can't be the case, because Jesus routinely conflicted with others. Does it mean we should not strive or fight to defend a principle, or to overcome evil? Again, Jesus and His disciples did both. However, although Jesus openly exposed corrupt authorities, He did not take their opposition personally. While hanging on the cross, Jesus said of His murderers, "Father forgive them" (Luke 22:34). This indicates that Jesus had their best interest at heart. We will see Jesus castigate the Pharisees in Matthew 23. The tongue lashing He gives them would have been humiliating. However, Jesus was offering them a great benefit: the opportunity to repent.

In the model prayer, Jesus uses the term *debts* to describe what needs to be *forgiven*. It is apparent that these *debts* are synonymous with *transgressions* based on Jesus' explanation of the main point following the prayer (Matthew 6:14-15). The emphasis seems to be that these *transgressions* have occurred in the past and are still outstanding.

A *debt* is incurred when a transaction takes place where the one who receives has yet to repay. In this case, the one praying has received an offense, and it is outstanding. It has not been repaid. In order to tell God *as we have forgiven our debtors*, the debt has to have already been cancelled, since the phrase *have forgiven* is past tense. To *forgive debts* owed us means to cancel the obligation for repayment. In the case of an offense, the repayment would likely be some form of retribution or punishment. To cancel these *debts* would have the effect of relieving our perceived need to take necessary steps to bring justice upon the head of the offender.

It is also worth noting that the terms *debts* and *transgressions* are plural. It seems the expectation is that there will be numerous persons committing multiple offenses against each follower of

Jesus. It also seems the expectation is that each person praying will have multiple *debts* outstanding that have violated God's standards for our behavior.

The transgressions of Matthew 6:14-15 is a translation of a Greek word that is also translated fall, sin, offense, and fault ("paraptoma" G3900). It refers to a violation of an ethical standard. In this context, it refers to someone's offense against a standard held by a praying disciple. Perhaps their values were violated. Or perhaps someone offended their view of themselves, or failed to meet their expectations. This is the application in the phrase *forgive others for their transgressions* against you.

Transgressions is also used to refer to wrongs the praying person has done against God and others.

The clear message is that however the praying disciple practices forgiveness toward others sets the standard for how God will deal with them. This is consistent with the Apostle Paul's instruction in Romans 1:18-28 that the "wrath of God" is revealed against all unrighteousness practiced by humans, and God expresses His wrath by giving people over to the unrighteous things they desire. God gives sinners what they want, which ultimately leads to self-destruction. All sin is self-destructive. Bitterness toward others is among the most self-destructive sins (Hebrews 12:14-15). The application here seems to be that if we insist on being angry toward others, God will turn us over to our anger. It will corrode our lives and disrupt our relational harmony with God, as well as our relationships with people.

After placing this pivotal point in the middle of His prayer, Jesus begins to unfold the back half of the chiasm. As He prayed for God to take care of physical needs (*give us this day our daily bread*) before praying the mercy principle, so now He instructs His disciples to ask God to take care of spiritual well-being by adding: *and do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil*. This is a request of God to protect the heart from temptations while living in the world. Jesus instructs us to ask for protection, that we might keep our eyes fixed on God's *will* and what needs to *be done* and not get distracted by lusts for pleasure, wealth, or ambition. This prayer of spiritual dependence is the C' phrase in the chiasm and is paired with the C phrase that recognizes our physical dependence on God in providing our *daily bread*.

Jesus's phrase *but deliver us from evil* is a request for *our Father* to provide a way out of tempting situations. The Greek word that Matthew uses for *evil* is "poneros" (G4190). It can refer to degenerative influence and spiritual harm from moral evil or the bad effects and physical harm from natural evil. It is likely that Jesus primarily means spiritual evil in this situation, but because we live in a physical world with spiritual interactions (we ourselves are both physical and spiritual) He is likely using *poneros* (*evil*) in both senses. God always has the power to *deliver us from evil*. 1 Corinthians 10:13 promises that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear. There is no *evil* beyond God's power to help us (Isaiah 59:1). And there is no evil circumstance He is unable to redeem (Romans 8:28). But it is important for us to remember that we have to rely on Him *to deliver us*. Jesus's prayer is both a remembrance of this truth and an expression of dependence upon God for deliverance.

Echoing His earlier line *Your kingdom come*, the B phrase in the chiasm, Jesus prays *Yours is the kingdom*, the B' phrase. He is again acknowledging whose *kingdom* His disciples belong to, a *kingdom* that is real, but currently not yet fully come to this world. Finally, Jesus ends His prayer the way He began it—Hallowing God's *name*, attributing *all the power and glory* to God *forever*. This completes the chiasm with the A' phrase, which echoes the A phrase *Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name*.

Jesus then ends the prayer with *Amen*. *Amen* is an English transliteration of the Greek word "amen." The Greek word "amen" is a transliteration of the Hebrew word "amen." The word appears also in Latin. It means "may it be so" and can appear at the beginning or end of a statement. In western culture it is most often associated with the end of a prayer, or an affirmation of a statement.

Jesus signals to the listener that He has ended the model prayer, then explains why He made the mercy principle the main point of the chiasmic prayer, saying, *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*.

Biblical Text

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.