“The Most Important Sermon on Prayer Ever Given” // Matthew 6:5–15 // Sermon on the Mount # 7[1]

Campus Reader: 5 “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 Pray then like this:

“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 also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

[1] Sources consulted: Tyler Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools;* John Mark Comer, “Prayer: Teach Us to Pray,” from Practicing the Way series, preached at Bridgetown Church; Tim Lucas, “Honest to God,” sermon on Matthew 6:5–8, preached at Liquid Church; David Platt, “Desire: Do We Want Him?,” sermon series *Lifeline: Power Through Prayer*, July 8, 2007; Tim Mackie, “The Lord’s Prayer”, July 2, 2018, Bible Project Podcast ‘Matthew Marathon’; Tim Keller, “Jesus’ Prayer for All Time”, November 25, 2007, Redeemer Presbyterian; Joby Martin, “Our Father”, May 31, 2020, The Church of Eleven22; Erwin Lutzer, “Secret Praying”, January 11, 1998, Moody Church. And others as noted throughout.

Reader: *This is the Word of God for the people of God*
Congregation: *Thanks be to God*

You may be seated.

Before we get started, I want to tell you about a big event coming up in January: our **WinCon** for college students… We've done this for a few years now, it's incredible. Students from our church plants across the nation come together for a weekend of worship, teaching and vision for what God is doing in the world. It's one of the best things we do--if you are a college student, you'll want to be there, and if you know a college student, you'll want to get them there. It's happening Jan. 15–16 at the Capital Hills campus. It will be packed to the gills. Early bird pricing ends Dec. 13, so go ahead and get registered before prices go up and spots fill up.

A lot of Christians have issues when it comes to prayer. We love the ***idea*** of prayer; it's the actual praying that gives us trouble. In fact, I bet if I said to you right now, *"What's one thing you wish you'd given more time to this past week?"* a lot of us would say "prayer." Theologian D.A. Carson says it's the hardest thing for Christians to master: we can establish a regular Bible reading rhythm, start serving, and even get our giving established, but people struggle with prayer.

And if I said to you right now, "Let's all bow our heads and spend the next ten minutes praying," some of you would think, "Ten minutes? I think I got the first 30 seconds covered, but I'm not sure what I'd say for nine and a half of those minutes!"

So, let's just ask it out loud: ***Why is prayer so hard?***

Well, sometimes we're honestly not sure how much difference it makes. Right? I mean, nobody wants to admit this in church, but sometimes you pray and things happen. Sometimes you pray and they don't. And sometimes you forget to pray—and the thing you forgot to pray for happens anyway. And you're like, "I'm not sure what to do with all that."

Sometimes it's just hard to talk to someone you can't see, and sometimes you just don't know what to say. Our minds wander. We start repeating nonsensical phrases we've heard other Christians use, without knowing what they mean.

For example, I remember as a teenager hearing people ask for "traveling mercies," and I'd wonder, "What exactly are traveling … mercies?" Do they activate when you walk out the door, or only after you start the car?" And statistically, I think more people die in their houses than on the road, so maybe we should be asking for staying mercies, too?"

These may or may not be your same questions, but most of us know what it feels like to struggle in prayer.

So, it's not surprising to me that Jesus **devoted time in his most important sermon to prayer.** Remember, the recurring theme of the Sermon on the Mount is the difference between looking religious and really knowing God and this prayer encapsulates it. What Jesus teaches here about prayer encapsulates what it means to know God.

We call this passage "the Lord's Prayer," but I really think we should call it "the Model Prayer," because Jesus' aim in this prayer is to give us a model—a template to use—whenever we pray. I've heard it said that the best way to use this prayer is **like a jazz musician uses the melody line of a song**: a jazz musician takes a familiar melody and then improvises around it; that's how you are supposed to use this prayer. You use it as an outline and riff on it. The point is not to memorize this and quote it at a football game for good luck; the point is to embed this outline in your mind and then riff off of it.

It's hard for me to overstate the importance of what we're about to look at. **Martin Luther once said,** "How many pray the Lord's Prayer a thousand times in the course of a year, and yet if they were to keep on doing so for a thousand more years, they would not have really prayed or tasted it at all."

There's so much in here! And, what I'm going to give you is SO practical. What we walk through today, you can actually use tomorrow morning in your prayer time.

Let's start in vs 5, though, because before Jesus teaches us HOW to pray, he first teaches us how ***NOT*** to pray.

vs 5, Jesus says, don't pray "*like the hypocrites*," by which he means the Pharisees. And how do they pray, Jesus asks? They pray, vs 5, to "*be seen by others*." When they pray, that's primarily what's on their minds. In prayer they are *using* God for something else they really want, which is admiration and praise by others. By contrast, Jesus says, vs 6, shut your door and pray in secret, because what you want out of prayer is simply more of God himself.

It's the age-old distinction of whether you find God *useful* or *beautiful*. Finding God "useful" means he helps you get what you want—a useful tool for obtaining what you want; finding him "beautiful" means *he is what you want*. Think of it like this: Ever had someone seem really interested in being your friend—but at some point you realized what they really wanted was access to somebody you knew? They weren't inviting you to lunch because they enjoyed your company; they were hoping you could get their résumé in front of your boss. And you thought, "Oh … you don't really want me. You want what knowing me can get you."

That's what Jesus is exposing here. These people are talking to God, but what they really want is for everybody else to *notice they're talking to God*. God is their means of getting admiration. But real prayer, Jesus says, declares, *"Father, even if nobody ever knows we had this conversation, and I don't get any physical thing out of it, being with you is enough."*

So, don't pray like the Pharisees, you are trying to use God. Second, Jesus says, **vs 7**, don't pray like the pagans—that's what *'Gentiles'* means. **And how do they pray?** Well, vs 7, they think God will hear them because they pile up words. By contrast, he says, you pray to a Father whom you already know cares about you and already knows what you need.

Pagan prayers assume God doesn't care about them and thus they have to do something to get this attention, and part of what they use is the structure of the prayer itself. Every religion has some version of this, btw--some Christians have a Hail Mary they repeat, or even this Lord's Prayer; for Muslims, they say the "salat" five times a day. The Muslims I lived with in SE Asia had a whole series of things you had to do during the salat to get God's attention, and if you did it all right, God was more likely to listen to you. In fact, they taught that a prayer said at the mosque counted with God 25x more than a prayer at home, and a prayer offered in Mecca was something like 100,000x more valuable.[2] Jesus says, "That's how a pagan thinks."

You, vs 8, have a "Father (who delights to hear you) knows what you need (even) before you ask him."

And that's the first word we use in this prayer, vs 9, "Our **Father…"**

Theologian J.I. Packer says that our understanding of Christianity is measured by how well we grasp the word 'Father.'

Years ago, when one of my daughters was three, we were doing an outdoor baptism service and there were about 65 people in line waiting to be baptized and hundreds of people watching, when suddenly my 3-year-old burst through the crowd—she skipped the whole line like it wasn't even there and ran straight up to me. She didn't ask herself whether maybe I was busy or the fact that I was in the pool with a bunch of cameras on me meant that I was doing something important. No—she had drawn a picture in her Sunday School class and she wanted to show it to me and she just assumed I'd want to see it. **And she was RIGHT.** She didn't feel like she needed to impress me before she could approach me; she knew I delighted in her.

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[2] Hadith, Bukhari 757; Ibn Majah 1406.

Is this how you believe God feels about you when you pray? Some of the old Christian mystics used to ask: **What expression do you see on God's face when you pray?** Think about that right now: Picture God's face toward you when you pray. What expression is he wearing? Is it the face of a n exasperated judge with a list of infractions? Or a frustrated father who is always mildly disappointed in you? Or a distracted parent with more important things to do? ***Or, is it a gushing Father who welcomes you and delights to hear you?***

Maybe you feel like you have to make God some promises before he'll listen and so the first part of your prayers are a bunch of promises about how much better you plan to be: "God, if you'll listen to me, I'll start doing *this* or stop doing *that*. I'll quit cussing as much and stop kicking the dog and recycle better." And you should do those things—but it's like you're trying to buy his favor on credit.

The gospel is that God offers you his love and acceptance freely as a gift. There's nothing you could do that would make God love you any more, and nothing you have done that would make him love you any less. It's full love and acceptance given without qualification and without measure. You say, "But what about my sin? I mean, there's so many things I've done I know God is unhappy with." That's true. Jesus came to deal with that very sin, and he did that by living the life we should have lived and dying the death we deserved to die, in our place. We couldn't talk our way across the distance our sin had created. Jesus crossed it for us.

And when you receive that as your own, you come to God as a beloved child, not as a defendant awaiting your sentence or an employee trying to earn a bonus. You can come like my 3-year-old daughter: straight through the crowd, confident that your Father fully loves and accepts you and wants to hear what you came to tell him.

That's where this prayer starts: ***Our Father.*** **Here's the 2nd phrase:** "…hallowed be your name"

People see that word "hallowed" and think, "What does that word even mean?" I heard a guy who grew up in a more liturgical church say that until he was 8 years old he thought God's name was 'Howard,' because every time they recited this prayer he thought everyone was saying, "Our father who art in heaven, Howard be your name." Hallowed be your name.

But ***"hallowed"*** means "honored as holy." We're praying that we—and everyone around us—would see God as he really is, because--get this--a distorted view of God is at the root of all the world's problems.

You see, from the beginning, Satan's strategy has been to distort our view of God. So when he tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, the first thing he did was try and get her to question God's goodness. He said, "You know, in making this rule about this tree, God's trying to keep something good from you." "

Even the name for God he used was an attempt to distort. We don't see this as easily in English, but up until the temptation God has been called **"the LORD God"**—in Hebrew, "**Yahweh Elohim**." Yahweh is his personal name; Elohim is the title. When the serpent tempts Eve, for the first time he uses only "Elohim." He dropped the personal name for God and used only the title, subtly portraying God as a distant authority rather than someone she could trust.[3]

Praying "Hallowed be your name" means "Let me and others see you as you *really* are." In fact, let me jump to the other end of the Bible. The book of Revelation tells us about four living creatures that stand before God's throne, worshipping day and night. Revelation says they each have six wings and they are covered with eyes from front to back—they have even under their wings, and day and night they never stop saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

Now, six wings—that makes sense. That's like turbo-flying ability, and sounds pretty cool. But covered with eyes—even under their wings—in their armpits? That's bizarre, right? Even a little gross. But everything God does is for a purpose, right? He gave ducks webbed feet to paddle through water and woodpeckers strong beaks to bore into trees. So what do all these eyes do? They see.

The people around the throne to see all of God's glory. He's not talking about literal eyes; he's talking about how clearly they see God. And the more they see, the more they worship. That's what we're asking for: *"God, give me and my kids and my community more eyes to see you more clearly."*

One of the most significant passages I've read from a book in the last decade came from Dane Ortlund's book *Gentle and Lowly*. Let me take you through it slowly:

"The fall in Genesis 3 not only sent us into condemnation and exile, it also entrenched in our minds dark thoughts of God, thoughts that are only dug out over multiple exposures to the gospel over many years.

"Perhaps Satan's greatest victory in your life today is not the sin in which you regularly indulge but the dark thoughts of God's heart that cause you to go there in the first place, and keep you cool toward him in the wake of it."

Think about that: the distorted view of God that draws you into sin can also keep you from returning to him afterward. You sin because you assume, "God is withholding something good." And after you sin, he whispers, "And now he won't want you back."

"Hallowed be your name" is a prayer to escape that deception: "Father, clear away the lies. Let me see you as you really are." As a good, good, loving Father, in whose presence is the fullness of joy and at whose right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Jesus continues: Vs 10, "…your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

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[3] Staton, Tyler. *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools: An Invitation to the Wonder and Mystery of Prayer* (p. 63). (Function). Kindle Edition.

To understand this part of the prayer, we need to remember why God created us in the first place. So, again, let's go back to the Garden of Eden. When God put Adam and Eve into the Garden, he gave them two assignments: (1) to cultivate his creation and (2) to rule it under his authority. He filled the world with raw materials for us to develop for his glory and human flourishing. We were his co-creators and co-rulers, extending his good purposes throughout the earth.

But when we sinned, we surrendered that "rule" to dark powers. Think about it: What does Jesus call Satan when he meets him in the wilderness? He calls him, **"the ruler of this world." Ruler of this world?** That was supposed to be us!

Well, through his death and resurrection, Jesus broke Satan's power and took away his official right to that rule.[4] And so, at the close of the Gospels, after the death and resurrection, Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). And then he invites them to extend the news of that rule to the ends of the earth.

That's the language he's invoking here in this prayer, because prayer is now the means by which we extend his rule on the earth. Prayer is the gateway to Jesus's authority. We're extending his victory into whatever we pray about.[5]

That's why, by the way, we say "in Jesus' name" at the end of our prayers. That's not supposed to be just a little coda that we use at the end of our prayer that signals to God we're almost done. Most Christians use it like they are saying, "In conclusion (I'm almost done, God!), in Jesus' name, Amen."

No, we're ***invoking his authority*** and ***extending his rule*** on the earth. Tyler Staton says, "If you're a follower of Jesus, every single time you pray, you come before the Father clothed in the robe and crown of a ruler. In the eyes of heaven, you are filled with Jesus' status and standing."

When we pray in Jesus' name, we're participating with Jesus in his kingdom-restoration project. In fact, let me point out something in the Greek here that you won't see in English—it's a little nerdy but super awesome—Eugene Peterson points out that in this part of the prayer, Jesus uses what we call in Greek the "middle voice" for the verb. "Middle voice" is not something we use a lot in English, but basically in Greek you've got three possibilities: the active voice, the passive voice, and the middle voice.

- In the active voice, I am doing the action: "I sing."
- In the passive voice, I am being acted upon: "I was sung to."
- In the middle voice, I'm joining in the action of someone else: *"I sang along."* I didn't start the song. I didn't write the melody. But I get to join in.

That's what we're doing in prayer. Jesus started the song, and we add our voices: "*Your kingdom come. Your will be done.*"[6]

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[4] Colossians 2:13–15.
[5] Tyler Staton, *Praying like Monks, Living Like Fools*, 103.
[6] Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*, p 105. See Staton, 103.

Y'all, think of the power in prayer! You're coming with Jesus' authority and power to extend his purposes on earth. I love how **Tyler Staton** says it: "If we really took Jesus' invitation seriously, if we really believed in the sort of prayer that Jesus talked about, the modern church would have a hard time getting its people to do anything but pray."[7]

By the way, if you're going to do this well, two key elements are necessary: *The first is:* *Knowledge of the Scriptures:* You see, Scripture is how we know what Jesus wants to do in the world. We always say, **Prayers that start in heaven are heard by heaven.** So when you're reading the Bible and see a promise, write it down and pray it back to him. One author says, *"Our most powerful prayers are hyperlinked to the promises of God."*[8]

*The **second key element in praying this way is***: ***The Leadership of the Holy Spirit.*** You see, the Holy Spirit actively guides us into what he wants in particular situations. He'll put specific burdens in your heart, specific things he wants you to pray; miracles to ask for. Which is why sometimes on our prayer app, or during our prayer meetings, we'll encourage you just to be quiet and listen for the voice of the Spirit. He can guide you into what to pray. That's what we call "middle voice" praying, and the more you know the Bible and the more in touch you are with the Spirit, the better you'll do this. Next time you pray, and you come to this part of the Lord's prayer, try saying this: "God, I don't want to simply pray *to you,* I want to pray *with you*. So, Holy Spirit, guide me as I pray." Remember, the prayers that start in heaven are the ones heard by heaven.

Now, before we move on to Jesus's next phrase in this prayer, let me make a **quick observation about the distinction between "your kingdom come"** and **"your will be done,"** because I've really found this distinction helpful. Again, **Eugene Peterson**: he says these two phrases pull at opposite sides of a tension: *"Let your kingdom come"* is us attempting to pray into existence what God wants: "God, this is broken, let your kingdom come here." *"Let your will be done"* is an expression of trust that his way is better, and we surrender to that.

You see, even though we're co-rulers with God, we recognize that our Father is wiser than us, and so we submit our understanding of what should happen to him. Again, it goes back to the childlike posture we adopt in prayer. Parents: don't our kids often ask us for something that *seems* good to them from their POV, but as loving parents we see dangers and consequences they don't. "Dad, can I take the toaster into the bathtub? I want to make *WAFFLES* while I soak." "Dad, can we put the trampoline on the roof? I want to do a super-high high dive into the pool." And we say, "no." From my kid's perspective, I'm standing between him and the greatest afternoon of his life. From my perspective, I'm standing between him and the emergency room.

We exercise the same humility when we pray. We say, "God, I think this is what we need, but ultimately you know best and I trust you."[9] Let your will be done. Peterson says, **"Let your kingdom come"** is the kind of thing you pray in the morning to get started on your day; but **"let your will be done"** is what you pray in the evening when you lay down to bed and rest in his sovereign ordering of your life.

Next phrase: "11 Give us this day our daily bread,"

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[7] Staton, 98.
[8] Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker*
[9] Tim Keller, "Jesus' Prayer for All Time ", November 25, 2007, Redeemer Presbyterian

Back then, "***bread***" symbolized basic sustenance—a**nd could I just point out here that Jesus *liked* bread? I just feel like everybody's hatin' on bread nowadays. And** genuine compassion for those of you with celiac, but for a lot of people it just seems trendy. So I just want to point out that Jesus liked bread and told us to ask God for more of it. He doesn't say "give us our daily kale" or "give us our daily juice cleanse" and Jesus would NEVER have ordered the bunless hamburger, I can assure you of that. I can't prove that from the Bible, but in my heart I know it's true.

But I digress … The real point here is that Jesus teaches us to pray for daily bread, even though most of us assume "daily bread" is a mundane thing that is *our* responsibility. And *praying for it doesn't mean we don't also work for it*; just that at the end of the day, the weight of provision *rests on him*, *not us*.

And, because "bread" was such a basic element of sustenance in those days, we're supposed to use "bread" as a stand-in for everything we need throughout a day: A job. Friends. The **wisdom** we need in parenting. The **words to say** in a difficult situation. **Guidance** for making a decision. **Stamina to finish an assignmen**t. Whatever you need, the weight of provision for all those things rests on him.

- **Y'all, just for funsies, I went through Scripture** and made a list of things various people in the Bible asked God for—listen to the breadth of this list of things people in the Bible prayed for and received in answer to prayer:
  - **Zechariah and Elizabeth** wanted a family and so in their old age they prayed to God for a son and God gave them one.
  - **Solomon** prayed for wisdom to do well in his new job because he was taking over for his dad who was a legend and because Solomon was a young man with no experience, no one thought he was up to the job.
  - **Abraham's servant prayed for help finding Isaac a wife.** Before he logged onto christianmingle.com or TabernacleTinder.com he brought the request to God.
  - **Rebekah** wanted to know why her pregnancy was so hard, so she asked God for insight (and he gave it).
  - **Samson** prayed for strength when his task felt like more than his body could accomplish.
  - **Joshua** prayed for more daylight to finish a battle. Most of us ask for more time; Joshua asked God to *stop the sun.*
  - **Daniel prayed that God** would give him the interpretation to his friend's dream so that his friend would see God was real.
  - **Gideon** prayed for confirmation as to whether or not he should do something risky.
  - **David prayed for forgiveness** after committing adultery and murder. He prayed that God would give him a clean heart and a renewed, steadfast spirit and God enabled him to write some of the most beautiful worship poetry ever recorded.
  - **Elijah prayed** that it wouldn't rain so people would know that Baal wasn't real. And then he prayed that it would start raining so they'd know God was.
  - **An unnamed woman** in the Gospels prayed that Jesus would take away chronic pain that kept her homebound.
  - The **disciples prayed for boldness in the face of** intimidation.
  - Paul **prayed for supernatural insights into his friends' lives** so he could speak God's word to them.
  - Peter asked Jesus for **financial help so he could pay an unexpected tax bill.**
  - **A desperate dad asked Jesus to heal his little girl**.
  - Jesus prayed that his **disciples would stop acting like idiots** and be unified.

- The point is, it's not just *spiritual* stuff they prayed for: They prayed for *children. Work. Marriage. Strength. Time. Confirmation. Direction. Forgiveness. Weather. Pain. Friendships. Courage. Health. Money. Unity.* ***The question is:*** **What part of your life do you think you *aren't* allowed to bring to God?**
- **Here's the bottom line**: *If it matters to you, it matters to God*, and you can pray about it.
- **In Philippians 4:6**, Paul says, "Do not be anxious about ***anything***, but pray about everything, letting your requests, with thanksgiving, be made known to God." **Which means *if you're anxious about it*,** you should **PRAY about it!** If it matters to you, it matters to God! If it *causes you anxiety*, commit it to God and trust him with it.

Next phrase: 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

This phrase is so important that Jesus is going to expound on it after he concludes the prayer—vv. 14–15. This is the only thing in the whole prayer, by the way, he expounds on, which shows you its importance! And that's because this phrase encapsulates the whole basis of our relationship with God.

We are forgiven of much, so we become forgiven people. The reality is that there's NEVER a day where we don't need to pray this part of the prayer. Until I die, everything about me will be tainted with sin.

- Every thought I've ever had—even the spiritual ones—are mixed with wrong motives. At my core, I'm selfish, glory-seeking, unbelieving, angry, and vengeful. I lack self-control and I often prioritize the wants of my body over the will of God.
- And if you don't know that about yourself, you just don't know yourself.
- The Apostle Paul, Romans 7, said he was that way. Even those who look squeaky clean on the outside, if you could really see into their hearts, you'd see how corrupted and deformed the motives and intents of our hearts are.
  - The heart is deceitful above all things, Jeremiah says, and desperately wicked.
  - Have you ever picked up an **apple that looked perfect (PIC)**—shiny red skin, beautiful color—and then cut it open and found it rotten inside? The outside gave you no idea what was happening at the core. A lot of us do that with our lives: polish our reputation while leaving our motives untouched. People see the generosity; God sees the need for applause. People hear the gracious words; God sees the resentment underneath.
  - **Which is why in salvation**, God is not just trying to give us a better polish. He's giving us a new heart.
- But see, even after he puts *this new heart in you*, it still exists within this fallen flesh, and the flesh's corruption and temptation stays with you until you die and Jesus resurrects you his glorious likeness. Which means that as long as you're alive, this side of the resurrection, those **mixed motives of your fallen heart won't go away.**
  - I've told you: **John Newton,** the writer of "Amazing Grace," once wrote to a pastor discouraged by his ongoing struggle with sin. Now in his 80s, Newton admitted he'd expected to be past many temptations, yet some felt stronger than ever. He'd come to see that those struggles kept him dependent on God and guarded him against pride. Growth in grace, he explained, doesn't mean reaching a point where we no longer need grace; it means becoming more aware of how desperately we need it.
  - As the old Puritans used to say, *"Even our tears of repentance have to be washed in the blood of the Lamb."*

Which is why we pray this phrase. The good news is that God loves us fully, right now, in spite of our corruption. He sees us at our core and regards us as fully righteous in Christ. Period.

I'll say it again: if you've accepted Christ, God could not love you more than he does right now. In heaven, after you've been there 10,000 years and are perfect, he won't love you more in heaven than he does right now, at this moment … because you are fully righteous in Christ.

The struggle is trusting that enough to rest in it. Confession reminds you of it, and gives you a chance to re-believe the gospel.

And, as you do that, it makes you gracious with others. That's why Jesus **connects** *God's forgiveness of us* with *our forgiveness of others*:
"…Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

By the way, what Jesus says after the prayer in vs 14 sometimes confuses people: "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Because, it sounds like Jesus is saying he might cancel our salvation if we don't forgive others enough--like forgiveness is a "good work" we have to do to maintain our salvation. **But that would go against the whole premise of the gospel, *so he can't mean that.***

No, the point Jesus is making is that IF you've really experienced that forgiveness, you'll show that is by forgiving others--and if you have an unforgiving spirit, that just shows you've never really experienced his forgiveness. There's no way to have any grasp on God's forgiveness of you and not become a forgiving person. **Illustration I always use… Mac Truck**

Confessing your sins reacquaints you with the grace of God toward you, which makes you more gracious toward others.

- You see, when someone sins against you and you hold a grudge, which I've done a lot in my life, you're implicitly saying, 'I would never do something like that.' My resentment of and anger toward the person who wronged me is fueled and sustained by this sense of superiority and self-righteousness over them.
- Think of someone you can't forgive right now … someone who hurt you or wronged you or lied about you or betrayed you. Don't you have this quiet assumption: *I would never do what they did. I'm better than that. I'm better than … THEM.*
- You've literally forgotten the gospel and have little-to-no awareness of your own need for mercy. When you grasp that, you won't be able to cling to bitterness and resentment.

Daily confession helps make that real.

Finally, last phrase: 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Let me tell you something really sobering. Because this fallen flesh will be a part of me until the day I die, "**Everything necessary to destroy my Christian life is already inside of me**," and if God took his preserving hand off of me for even a single second, evil from inside me would overwhelm me!

And so I have to pray to God daily, *"Lead me away from the things that will destroy me, because everything necessary to destroy my Christian life I carry around right here."* And he will. He'll always provide you, he promises, a way of escape when you ask for it.

Y'all, I'm a child of the 80's, back when **video games** were pure and simple: there were dots on the screen and you'd eat them; missiles reigning down and you would shoot them; donkeys rolling barrels and you'd jump over them.

One of the best video games of all time was **Pac-Man. Just work your way through the maze and eat the dots on the screen. But remember the one thing that would destroy you? The GHOSTS. But if you were a skilled player, when they came after you,** you could always make your way to the side, duck out of the trap door and be free. In the first few stages of the game they couldn't follow you!

Listen, God is always ready to provide a trap door of escape for you, but we have to *pray those doors of escape into existence*, both for ourselves and for others. I pray them for my kids: *"My God, lead them away from the evil impulses of their fallen flesh. God they've got so much of their mama in them, deliver them (Just kidding). They have so much of me. Lead them away from things that will appeal to the fallen parts of their flesh and lead them to the paths of righteousness!"*

Which brings us to the second part of this phrase: ***"Deliver us from evil."*** **If temptation speaks to the wickedness within,** "evil" probably points to the attacks from the outside.

You see, not only do we carry evil around inside us, we have another enemy … not unlike the **ghosts in Pac-Man** who are trying to back us into a corner; who knows our weaknesses and can tailor temptations specifically toward us. His sole goal is to steal, kill and destroy, and the bad news is that we are powerless, in and of ourselves, against him. If PacMan runs into the ghost, he dies.

UNLESS. You eat a little flashy dot first, and then you can gobble up those ghosts. ***Think of this prayer as one of the big flashing dots***. And it's like in the game--in the game, you never want to be far from one of those dots! Because when the ghosts come, they might be your only hope. ***Jesus gave you this flashing dot called "the Lord's Prayer" to provide yourself a way of escape whenever you need it.***

CONCLUSION / VAMP

Let me bring this back to where we started: Jesus gives us an outline for prayer that he wants us to riff" off of. This is more than a prayer; *it's Jesus' entire vision of reality!*[10] It's an encapsulation of our whole relationship to God.

So, here's my challenge: try this actual outline to begin your prayer time every day for the next month. Literally, just go through this outline, piece by piece, and riff on it.

I promise, you'll find it so rewarding. Read the line, think about how I've explained it to you, and then personalize it.

I've done that now for several years, and it has revolutionized my prayer life.

Here's how I try to do it…

- ***Our Father…*** thank you that I don't have to earn; that I'm fully accepted by you and you're ready to hear me and help me; in fact, you already know what I need
- ***Hallowed be your name…*** help me and my kids and my church see you the right way. Because that's everything, Jesus!
- ***Let your kingdom come…*** in my kid's lives. In this church. In this community.
- ***Let your will be done…*** I don't know best, Jesus, you do. You know what I'm trying to ask. Take over and give me what's best. I trust you.
- ***Give us this day our daily bread…*** give me what i need to do this and that and the wisdom I need for parenting and to make this decision
- ***And forgive me of my debts as I forgive my debtors…*** Here's all the ways I've sinned. But thank you for forgiving me. Help me to forgive Veronica and this or that friend or that guy on social media for how they've hurt me
- ***And lead me not into temptation…*** you know my flesh! It's as bad as ever. Keep me from the destruction I'll walk into the moment you pull your hand back
- ***But deliver me from evil***. There's an enemy walking around like a roaring lion seeking those to devour, and he'd love nothing more than to destroy me and my family, and to tarnish your name and hurt a lot of people… protect me from him.

Thank you for hearing all this Jesus. I pray in your name as your co-regent, invoking your authority and privilege to bring the kingdom of God into my life and my world, amen.

And give me traveling mercies, Lord, whatever they may be.

One last thing I have to point out—I can't close this until I do. The One who taught us this prayer made it possible for us to pray it:

- Jesus' death on the cross restored us to the Father. It moves us from enemies of God to beloved children.
- The cross showed us what God was like, and how truly hallowed his name was.

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[10] Tim Mackie

- The cross enables the restoration of the kingdom of God, both in us and through us to others. We can now ask in his name, on the basis of his completed work
- Jesus called himself the bread of life, and said that if he provided our salvation from sin, surely he'd take care of our daily needs, too.
- The cross provides our forgiveness and enables us to love others
- The last part of the prayer, though, is maybe the most striking. Jesus was not delivered from evil—he was overcome by it, and killed by it, so that he could deliver us from it.
- Jesus said in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Your will be done," which meant that God's Kingdom could come to me and I could be blessed forever by it.

When you learn to read this prayer correctly, you'll see it as one big, multi-faceted expression of the gospel! Like I said, it's not just a prayer, it's an entire vision of reality.

Stand with heads bowed… PRAYER TEAMS COME

Stand … Which part of this prayer do you most need? (e.g.) Come now and pray.

Most importantly: *Have you learned to relate to God this way?* It's a revolutionary way to relate to God that pervades this whole sermon:

- Not by works but by grace.
- Every religion in the world…
- Not the scales but a gift.
- Have you ever accepted grace, put your trust in Christ as your Savior, and received the Father's offer of love? You can right now? Come to one of these on the side …