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The Lord's prayer is foundational teaching on prayer in the Bible. It is a prayer that has been prayed both privately as well as in corporate worship for thousands of years. The Lord's prayer is often said in unison at our church and provides a good framework on how to pray. But what is the meaning of the Lord's prayer? Matthew's Gospel There are two examples of the Lord's prayer in Scripture. The first is found in the Gospel of Matthew. While Jesus is teaching his famous sermon on the mount, Jesus says: "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." Jesus continues, "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. 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. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: Our Father 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 lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:15-15). Observations 1. Before Jesus tells his disciples how to pray, he tells them how not to pray: they shouldn't pray like hypocrites, only to be seen by others. So part of the reason Jesus provides the Lord's prayer in Matthew's Gospel is to teach his disciples how not to pray. 2. God sees what you do in private. This doesn't mean you can only pray in private, but that your prayers shouldn't be for public praise. 3. God rewards faithful, well-intentioned prayer. 4. Wordiness for the purpose of impressing others is displeasing to God. We can fool others with exterior godliness, but not God. On the other side, if you are in a season of lament and grief, then you should feel encouraged to pour out your entire heart to God in prayer to him — regardless of how many words you use. The rebuke against wordiness is to prevent showiness. 5. God knows what you need before you ask him (Matthew 6:8). This doesn't mean you still shouldn't ask. You should, for lack of prayer is the reason behind why we don't get certain blessings (James 4:2-3). It just means you don't have to talk to God about something as if he doesn't already know about it. The meaning behind the Lord's prayer in Matthew's Gospel is to provide a contrast. Jesus uses this opportunity to teach his disciples how to pray, along with pitfalls to avoid in prayer. Luke's Gospel The second example of the Lord's prayer is found in Luke's Gospel: "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples' (Luke 11:1). And he said to them, "When you pray, say . . ." And this is when Jesus enters the Lord's prayer again (Luke 11:2-4), and then provides teaching on the importance of boldness in prayer (Luke 11:5-13). Quite simply, the reason why Jesus provides the Lord's Prayer in Luke's Gospel is that one of his disciples asked him about prayer. The Meaning of the Lord's Prayer: Verse by Verse We have already looked at the significance of the Lord's Prayer both in Matthew's Gospel and Luke's. Now I want to give you my interpretation of the Lord's prayer. By that I mean I will cover each verse of the Lord's prayer, and provide meaning to each line. Notice the first half of the Lord's prayer is God-centered, whereas the second half of the Lord's prayer centers on the disciples and their needs. Our Father The Lord's prayer starts with "Our Father," not my Father. It's true for every Christian that God is Father, but by using the word "our" and not "my" Jesus teaches that prayer is a communal activity, not just an individual enterprise. It is staggering that disciples of Jesus can refer to God as Father, something no other religion teaches besides Christianity. Only on rare occasions in the Old Testament is God referred to as Father, and here, Jesus brings added revelation to the relationship of a disciple and God: we can call him Father (Galatians 4:6). This reveals the intimacy, warmth, and love of our God. In Heaven Where is God? Heaven. So we pray "Our Father in Heaven." This reminds us where God is right now, and where all of our loved ones in Christ presently reside. This little line is encouraging because it reminds us that, despite any issue we presently face, one day, everything is going to be okay for God's people. It also reminds God's children of his sovereign rule over all creation. As Psalm 115:3 says, "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases." What a beautiful truth that Christians not only have direct access to someone who resides in heaven but also someone who rules over all creation. Hallowed Be Your Name The word "hallowed" comes from the word "holy." The desire here is that God would be honored by his people and treated as he is: holy, holy, holy (Revelation 4:8). This prayer doesn't make God holy; he already is holy whether you pray or not. This is a prayer that God would be recognized for who he is. Before we get to supplications, we pray for God's holiness to be magnified in our lives. The Bible emphasizes God's holiness on many occasions, even at one point we see the word "holy" repeated for emphasis (Revelation 4:8). As R.C. Sproul says, "The Bible doesn't say God is 'love, love, love,' or 'grace, grace, grace.' The Bible says He is 'holy, holy, holy.'" That doesn't mean God's attribute of love is not important; it very much is, for God is love (c.f., John 4:16; although love is not God). The prominence given to God's holiness in Scripture simply reveals that this is an important aspect of his character. Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done, On Earth As it is in Heaven Whenever we think of "God's Kingdom," we may be tempted to think of heaven. The kingdom of God is indeed heaven, but it is also an expression to speak of something that is happening right now: the rule and reign of God on earth. This is more of a plea that God's Kingdom will continue to come and to extend through the earth. So this is why theologians have adopted the expression, "Already, but not yet." Is the Kingdom of God happening now or will it happen later? Yes. It's a both-and. In this context, we pray for God's Kingdom to come, for his increased rule to be exercised on earth. This means more people coming to faith in Jesus, and more aspects of God's kingdom being realized on earth. We want to see a bit of heaven on earth. We also pray "your will be done." This, once again, reminds the people of God of God's sovereign reign. God works all things in the universe through his decrees, and his providence is the actualization of his decrees. Before the foundation of the world, God decided . . . everything (Ephesians 1:11). He ordained everything that happens. This does not make prayer obsolete, for in a way that our finite minds cannot grasp, somehow, God includes our prayers as the means by which his decrees are realized. How? Don't know. Such knowledge is beyond our grasp. But we pray hard nevertheless. And when we pray "your will be done," we acknowledge God knows best, and we are submitting to his authority, even if his plans differ with ours. Give Us This Day our Daily Bread This is where you pray for provision. "Bread" is a symbol for all of life's needs. You may be good at praying for others, but have a hard time praying for yourself. Here Jesus gives you permission to pray for your personal needs. Pray for yourself! Paul says elsewhere that we can draw near to God with personal supplications (Philippians 4:6-8) and Peter says that we should cast all of our anxieties on God (1 Peter 5:7). So, pray for your daily needs, and your wants. As it's been said, God has promised to provide for your needs, not your greeds. If you find yourself in a good season, you may be tempted to neglect this prayer, but we should continue to pray it anyway as it reflects dependence on God. By encouraging his disciples to pray for their needs, Jesus reveals that his children must not be self-sufficient and think that they could do just fine without asking God for help. It also shows that prayer is not just a religious exercise, but a real way to get real help from a real God. Also, notice Jesus says "this day." Today. We are to pray for daily provision. We are to ask for today's needs and do the same tomorrow. This draws to mind the Old Testament Israelites. When they were relying on God to provide bread from heaven, the specific instruction from the Lord was that they would go to him every day to get just enough food (Exodus 16:4). They were specifically instructed not to get more food than they needed for the day; they were restricted from gathering all needed food for the week on Mondays. Why? Because God wanted them to get just enough food daily so they would learn to depend on him. And Forgive Us Our Debts, as We Also Have Forgiven Our Debtors Disciples of Jesus need not just physical needs, but also emotional and spiritual ones. So we are told to pray for the forgiveness of sins as we forgive others. I read somewhere of a common Puritan prayer that goes something like this: "Lord, forgive me for my sins, both known and unknown, confessed and unconfessed." After discovering this short prayer years ago, I have added it to my regular praying repertoire. And Lead Us Not Into Temptation, But Deliver us from Evil Or "the evil one." I once heard someone else pray, "Lord, protect me from the devil, his servants, and their works." Since hearing that prayer, I also pray the same, and it has become one of the most common prayers for my life. It's amazing how much more we can grow in our prayer life simply by listening to or praying with other believers. When it comes to fighting sin, we need God's hand for power and protection. For Yours is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory. Forever. Amen A quick side note. This sentence is not found in many of the reliable Greek manuscripts, but a variation of it can be found in Matthew 6:13 in some translations like the New King James but is omitted from other translations, such as the ESV. You can still pray this line; it's not biblically or theologically incorrect. There are some churches that still recite the Lord's prayer in unison and include this line. Conclusion This is how Jesus taught his disciples to pray. You don't have to repeat this prayer every single time you pray. When you pray, you should say more than just the literal words included in the Lord's prayer. Instead, the meaning of the Lord's prayer is to provide a framework for how to pray. It is governed by themes and reveals, by way of order of importance, what to say when you pray. I should add that sometimes — usually because of some sort of suffering — you can't follow a framework. Your heart is too heavy, and in these moments, it's simply best to start with what's on your heart (an idea I got from Paul Miller's book, A Praying Life) and go from there. You may also like: The Lord is My Shepherd: What Does This Mean?

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