

## **“The Lord’s Prayer”—Matthew 6:9-15**

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com).]*

Take your Bible and let’s meet in Matthew 6...

We are going to do a mini-series within our larger series (Hebrews) on the importance of Christian community. We are going to begin that next week. Today will simply be a stand-alone sermon on a familiar passage. We are going to look at what is usually referred to as the Lord’s Prayer. It’s familiar to most of you (maybe too familiar) and it’s something we have considered in the past. But since prayer is something we always can grow in, it is certainly worth reviewing what our Lord teaches us on the matter. So let’s look at it first and then we will do our best to consider it in one sermon (!). I’ll begin reading in verse 9. Follow along as I read. This is God’s Word...

*“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread, <sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’ <sup>14</sup> For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, <sup>15</sup> but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”*  
(Matthew 6:9-15)

Now, let’s work through the petitions...

### **“Our Father In Heaven”**

What an amazing way to begin the prayer. And what a good illustration of how our familiarity with the prayer so often keeps us from marveling on what is being stated. Jesus invites us to call on God as our Father. This is incredible. Like any loving father, His actions toward His children are always honorable and full of grace. Like a good father, He watches over His children, protecting and providing for them even as he allows them to endure challenging situations. If you are a Christian, God is your Father. That doctrine should be a warm blanket for your soul.<sup>1</sup> I will show you why the Fatherhood of God is comforting and helpful for us in a little bit. But we first must remind ourselves why we have the privilege of calling God our Father.

God is our Father because we have been adopted as His children through faith in Christ. Martin Luther, the great Protestant Reformer, reminded those under his care that God could “rightly and properly be a severe judge over us.”<sup>2</sup> We could relate to God in this way. But instead, because Jesus died for our sins and rose for our justification before God, we have not only been forgiven of all our hostility but we have been adopted as God’s children (e.g., Romans 8:14). He looks upon the believer with the same affection that He looks upon Jesus because we are in Christ. This is incredible Gospel truth, that we too often lose sight of. To pray to God as our “Father” is to pray in Jesus’ name because apart from Jesus we would have no such familial relationship with God.<sup>3</sup> So never forget, “When we say, ‘Our Father who is in heaven,’ we are not uttering a formal address but celebrating a relationship.”<sup>4</sup>

### ***“Hallowed Be Your Name”***

“Hallowed” is probably not a word that you use at all apart from reciting this prayer. When you “hallow” something you make it holy or you treat it as holy, or set apart. In this case, we are told to ask God for His name to be hallowed, which cannot mean to become holy. His name stands for who He is. He is holy. He can’t be made any holier than He already is by His very nature.

Jesus then is not telling us to pray that God would become holy, but rather that He would be treated as holy. He must be regarded as holy by us (cf. HCSB, NLT). Do our lives, which bare the name of God as Christians, convey the holiness of God? When we pray for His name to be hallowed, we have to be mindful of the way our lifestyles and choices may not reflect His holiness. We know the world certainly cares little for God’s holiness and even despises it. We should be asking God in our prayers to make this not so, both in our lives and in the nations. Jesus gives this petition priority. Do we?

### ***“Your Kingdom Come”***

In Matthew, God’s “Kingdom” refers to His “reign.” On one level, God reigns as sovereign over history. We have a tendency to forget this. It is quite common for people to ask Christians condescendingly whenever they disagree with any stance we take on any moral issue, “Surely you don’t want to be on the wrong side of history, do you?” Well, that depends on what we mean.

Second Thessalonians 2, for example, describes a man of lawlessness who rises up and deceives countless people. I guarantee you, those deceived will consider themselves on the “right side of history” and, in that instance, I *do* indeed want to be on the wrong side of *that* history. On the other hand, we must remember that God’s reign is seen in the reigning of the Christ, who is the Lord of history. The events of history are unfolding at the discretion and direction of the Lord Himself as He sovereignly brings His will to pass. So, absolutely, I don’t want to be on the wrong side of history. I want to be on the same side of history as Jesus. Since Jesus Christ is coming again, the only way ultimately to be on the right side of history is to belong to Him. As Christians, we belong to Christ, and thereby we will in time be shown to be on the right side of history.<sup>5</sup> His Kingdom comes.

When we ask for God’s kingdom to come, we are asking for that history to unfold. And since His kingdom stands for His reign, we are asking for His reign to be acknowledged and manifest in the world, both in the lives of His people and increasingly in the nations among those whom He will bring into His people. In that sense, this petition is akin to us asking for His name to be hallowed. Just as He is already holy and we want that to be acknowledged, so also He reigns and we want people to acknowledge that reality and submit to His Lordship.<sup>6</sup> No one will be saved who refuses to acknowledge Christ as Lord in this life.

Therefore, the request—“*your kingdom come*”—is, in some aspects, a missional or evangelistic request. God does reign. But we want people to see that and submit to His Kingship. We are seeing God’s kingdom come every time we see a conversion. That’s a new child of God, a new kingdom citizen. And we are seeing God’s kingdom come every time we see a deepening of commitment to Jesus and His way.<sup>7</sup> The more He reigns in our hearts the more the fullness of His reign may be felt in this world, which will lead to true justice and peace. We can experience this in some measure as those kingdom realities shape our lives and wills. But we will experience it ultimately when the Lord Jesus comes back.

In the meantime, I think R. C. Sproul has made a good point,

“...it is the task of the church to make the invisible kingdom visible, but how do we bear witness to the reality of a kingdom that already exists? We live in such a way as to bear witness to the

reality of the kingship of Christ, at work, within our family, in our school, and with our checkbook, because God in Christ is King over every one of these spheres of our life. The only way the kingdom of God is going to manifest in this world before Christ comes is if we manifest it in our lives.”<sup>8</sup>

So if we are not seeing some reflection of God’s reign in this world, it can only be because we are not seeing it in the lives of His children and in our personal lives. We may not be seeing it in our lives because we are not praying for His kingdom to come in this sense. Imagine if we were. What implications would it have in our world?

### ***“Your Will Be Done, On Earth As It Is In Heaven”***

“Your will be done” can be a difficult prayer to pray because of how strongly our own will enthrones itself in our heart. But God’s not establishing your kingdom, He unveiling His by revealing the King and dethroning you.

There is a chapter in a book called, *Dangerous Calling*, by Paul David Tripp, which addressed the dangerous temptations to “self-glory” in ministry. The chapter ends with the author’s own personal reflections.

“In love, [God] has worked to dent and deface my glory so that his glory would be my delight. He has plundered my kingdom so that his kingdom would be my joy. And he has crushed my crown under his feet so that I would quest to be a good ambassador and not crave to be king. In this violent mercy there is hope for every person in ministry. Your Lord is not just after the success of your ministry; he is working to dethrone you as well. It is only when his throne is more important than yours that you will find joy in the hard and humbling task of gospel ministry. And his face will not relent until our hearts have been fully captured by his glory. Now, that’s good news!”<sup>9</sup>

I share that with you as a reminder that seeking first God’s Kingdom and not our personal kingdom is something that every minister struggles with as well. This is the fight of faith. We are all involved in the same sanctifying work of God’s Spirit and His work is not always painless for us. In fact, it’s often a “violent mercy.” But in the end we will find it infinitely more satisfying to see God on the throne, than to fight to sit there ourselves.<sup>10</sup> That’s really the heart of this petition of the Lord’s Prayer—“*Your will be done.*”

In commenting on this request for God’s will to be done, Luther offers the following paraphrase: “Grant us grace to bear willingly all sorts of sickness, poverty, disgrace, suffering, and adversity and to recognize that in this your divine will is crucifying our will.”<sup>11</sup> Luther realized that in praying for God’s will to be accomplished, it might mean that his will at any particular moment must be left on the altar.

This, friends, is why it is vital for us to view God as “Father.” We can’t say with integrity, “*your will be done,*” unless we have a deep conviction that God is our loving Father. That’s what “frees us from all distrust” as John Calvin put it. That’s what frees us from the anxiety of sacrificing self on the altar of “thy will be done.” Joe Thorn describes this comforting implication of God’s Fatherhood like this: “Your anxieties are alleviated in the fatherhood of God. He cares for you with such love and precision that nothing befalls you that isn’t offered through his parental purposes for your good.”<sup>12</sup>

A child doesn’t usually understand the “why” of his father’s instructions, but when he obeys properly it’s because he trusts him. This is what the heavenly Father expects of us. We are to trust Him. Even when it doesn’t make sense, we are to trust that He is a loving Father who is working all things together for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28). This is why we can say, “*Your will be done.*” And notice, we are being

taught to ask for His will to be done “*on earth as it is in heaven.*” How is God’s will done by those in heaven? With absolute joy and without reservation! We are not to settle for a uttering “your will be done” in a spirit of resentment or resignation. “Oh fine, whatever you want God.” That’s not what God is after. He’s after willing and joyful obedience and submission. Even when it hurts, we can count it all joy (James 1:2) like Jesus, “*who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross*” (Hebrews 12:2). We willingly, not begrudgingly, trust the Lord, because He is our loving Father.

### “Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread”

What is “our daily bread”? It’s our necessities. It’s not a request for the luxuries of the world. It’s not a request for the newest iPhone or SUV. It’s not a request for a bigger or better home or an extra zero on the right side of our paycheck. No. It’s more basic than that. It’s, give me what I *need*. Give me what I need for *this day*.<sup>13</sup>

In some ways this reminds me of Proverbs 30:8, 9—“*give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.*” That’s some wisdom for you. There are temptations on both ends of the scale of wealth. When rich, we may be blinded to seeing our need for God.<sup>14</sup> When poor, we may resent the Lord. So the writer of Proverbs, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, expresses a desire to experience neither temptation, lest he stumble in these predictable ways. Perhaps that’s why Jesus focuses our minds only on our daily necessities when He teaches us to pray. And is it not a testimony of God’s abundant grace to us that most, if not all of us, in this place already have tomorrow’s bread in the refrigerator or bank account?<sup>15</sup> “*Every good and perfect gift is from above...from the Father...*” (James 1:17; NIV). We are not asking God to “sell us daily bread.” We are asking Him to provide it, acknowledging our constant need to depend on Him for such gifts.<sup>16</sup> And we find He has given above and beyond the needed portion.

Of course, some of you may see it differently. You may see it like Charlie Anderson saw it in the 1965 movie, *Shenandoah*. There is this scene where Charlie (played by Jimmy Stewart) is having a meal with his children shortly after his wife died. In the past the wife had prayed before the meals. Now the children looked to their father to pick up the task. He was no Christian and his prayer made that reality pretty obvious. He prayed something like this: “Dear Lord, thank you for this meal. We plowed the ground, we planted the seed, we pulled the weeds, we harvested the wheat, we grounded the flour, we baked the bread, but thank you, Lord, for this meal.”

As believers, we have a different perspective. We know who created the plants for our food. We know that He has given the taste buds to enjoy them. We know that He put us in an environment where we were taught to labor. We know He gives (and can take away) the strength to plant and harvest. We know that while His provisions may come through the God-given tasks He has appointed to us, He is nonetheless the giver of those provisions. All of them. We would not have any of them apart from his gracious initiative. So we give thanks for our daily bread and it’s a good habit to do so when we pause to enjoy it.<sup>17</sup>

Yet we are prone to forget the source of these gifts. Why? The irony of it all is that we are prone to forget the source of the gift because He has showered us with such an abundance of His provisions that we have forgotten what it means to “need” such things. We forget to count our blessings because we forget we have them or we confuse them with achievements we produced apart from Him. As Daniel Doriani notes,

“We miss the urgency of this prayer today. Americans live in a land of plenty. Indeed, we have so much food we worry more about obesity than hunger. We buy large quantities of food in well-stocked stores and stuff it in capacious refrigerators and freezers. We plan ahead, so that our food

seems to come from our work and our kitchen. In Jesus' day, it was more obvious to a laborer that he should pray daily for his daily bread. A common laborer lived on a payment for that day's work. If he could find no work or if his employer withheld his wages, he might go hungry. Western culture has changed enough (monthly paychecks are an example) that we do not feel the urgency to pray for food daily. But our food still comes from God, and we honor him when we acknowledge it."<sup>18</sup>

This is a good word.

Changing gears a bit, I also want you to notice the "us" language that permeates the Lord's Prayer. Have you noticed the corporate dimension of this prayer? "*Our* Father... Give *us*... *our* daily bread... forgive *us our* debts, as *we* also have forgiven *our* debtors. And lead *us* not into temptation, but deliver *us*..." It's corporate. That's not to say the prayer has to be prayed corporately or that our private prayers shouldn't be shaped by this model. But He assumes that these petitions will characterize our corporate praying, which itself is an assumption that we will pray corporately. As John Piper once said in a sermon, "There is something self-contradictory about praying with the words 'our,' 'us,' and 'we,' but never experiencing the our, us, and we in prayer."<sup>19</sup>

Notice then the balance to Jesus' counsel on prayer. In the preceding verses He said,

*"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and the street corners, that they may be seen by others... But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret."* (Matthew 6:5-6).

So He told us to pray privately but then a few verses later His model prayer is framed as though it were corporate... What gives? Well, if you remember from a few weeks ago, Jesus gives that instruction to combat the temptation to turn prayer into an applause-seeking device. He's not condemning all prayer that happens in public or privately with others. He's calling out the hypocrisy of praying in order to promote oneself as someone who prays or prays well. Therefore, as Piper writes, "This is very different from loving those you pray with and wanting to be caught up into a genuine unified togetherness of prayer to the God who is equally Father of all his children." Then he states this (which I've found helpful),

"One of the values of praying together, in fact, is that it can cut the root of pride by exposing us to the humility and heart-searching longings that get expressed in the prayers of others. My own prayers have often been reprov'd and corrected and deepened just by being in a group of godly people of prayer. In fact, I wonder if we should expect our private prayer life to advance in maturity and depth and intensity if we never pray with others who can lift us higher and take us deeper. Wouldn't that be like expecting a young person to become a gifted conversationalist, but always sending him away to play by himself whenever there are serious conversations?... praying together is not for the sake of exalting our individual strengths but for the sake of becoming one with the family and helping each other mature in the life of prayer."

That's good counsel. If all our praying is with or in front of others, there is a problem. If none of it is, there is also a problem. Both corporate and private prayers are needed. They fuel one another. "The more earnestly we pray in solitude, the more powerfully we pray in a group. And the more intense the prayer of the group, the more we will be helped to go hard after God in private."<sup>20</sup> This is, no doubt, one of the reasons we find the early church coming together so often to pray with one another (e.g., Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:24-30; 6:6; 12:5, 12; 13:2-3; 14:23; 20:36). That was part of their DNA. They learned that from Jesus. May the same be said of us.

On a related note, let me ask—should this corporate aspect of the Lord’s Prayer affect the way we understand the petitions? Martin Luther thought so (and I tend to agree). Think about how this “social dimension” relates to the petition for daily bread. Drawing on Luther, one recent book on prayer explains it like this:

“For all to get daily bread, there must be a thriving economy, good employment, and a just society. Therefore to pray ‘give us—all the people of the land—daily bread’ is to pray against ‘wanton exploitation’ in business, trade and labor, which [in Luther’s words] ‘crushes the poor and deprives them of their daily bread.’...For Luther, then, to pray for our daily bread is to pray for a prosperous and just social order.”<sup>21</sup>

If Luther is on the right track, then we should heed his warning—“Let them beware of...the intercession of the church, and let them take care that this petition of the Lord’s Prayer does not turn against them.”<sup>22</sup> Do you see what He is saying? It’s not consistent to pray for *our* daily bread (i.e., our society’s) and then live in a way that knowingly enables personal actions or systems that exploit the needy and prevent the poor from attaining the very necessities we are petitioning God for on their behalf. To do so would be to set ourselves up against the Lord. That’s not where we want to be. So it is wise for us to consider the cause of the poor and our brothers and sisters in the church.<sup>23</sup> Do they have what they need? Let’s pray that they do. And let’s live in a way that does what we can to ensure that they do, not in a way that creates the problem we are asking God to alleviate.

### **“Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Also Have Forgiven Our Debtors”**

With this Jesus moves from our physical needs to our chief spiritual need—forgiveness. He’s drawing our attention to our relationships with God and with others. The best way to understand the request of verse 12 is to read it with verses 14 and 15.

*“...forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors...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.”*

I think we have to be careful here, because these words are easily misunderstood. Some have taken verse 12 to mean that God will forgive us if and only if we forgive others. Is that true? Yeah. Actually it is. That’s what He has said. That may shock us, but that is what He said, is it not?<sup>24</sup> Indeed, He makes the same point in Matthew 18 where Jesus tells a whole parable about a man who was forgiven a huge debt and then fails to forgive a minor debt that he was owed. He graphically depicts the insanity of that situation and the dire consequences.

But doesn’t this conflict with other biblical teaching? If forgiveness is conditional, how can it be gracious? Isn’t the forgiveness of our salvation the free gift of God’s grace that we experience apart from any work that we have done to merit it (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9)? Yes. So how can we say that only those who forgive will be forgiven in the end *and* that God’s forgiveness comes apart from anything we do to earn it? Isn’t that a contradiction? No necessarily.

What if *all* truly forgiven people truly forgive? Then the tension evaporates. Think about it. What if Jesus and Scripture are saying that those who have experienced God’s forgiveness necessarily forgive as a result? In other words, the fact that Christians characteristically forgive others is evidence that they have experienced the forgiveness of God. A forgiving spirit necessarily follows in the lives of those who have experienced God’s forgiveness. The great Welsh preacher, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, offered some insightful logic:

“Who is the man who can pray, ‘Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors’? He is the man who already has a right to say, ‘Our Father’. And the only man who has a right to say ‘Our Father’ is the one who is in Christ Jesus.”<sup>25</sup>

The grace of God that is at work in the believer will be evident, among other things, in the way he or she forgives. If we refuse to forgive, then we sin and demonstrate a refusal to repent. The Bible teaches inescapably that repentance always accompanies saving faith. Thus a stubborn and ongoing refusal to forgive demonstrates a refusal to repent<sup>26</sup> and by extension the absence of a saving experience. As Piper writes,

“The reason is not because we can earn heaven or merit heaven by forgiving others, but because holding fast to an unforgiving spirit proves that we do not trust Christ. If we trust him, we will not spurn his way of life. If we trust him, we will not be able to take forgiveness from his hand for our million dollar debt and withhold it from our ten dollar debtor.”

In short, truly forgiven people are forgiving people. “Receiving [His] pardon is an amazing privilege, but it comes with a corresponding responsibility, extending pardon to others.”<sup>27</sup> Forgiven sinners forgive sinners. Forgiving others is a proof that testifies to our own saving experience. If that’s the case, then it *is* true that only forgiving people will stand before the throne of God forgiven in the end, not because they earned His forgiveness by their act of forgiving but because His forgiveness of them prompted the fruit of forgiving others in their lives.<sup>28</sup> As Paul said, you are to be “*forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you*” (Ephesians 4:32). In this way, God’s forgiveness and our forgiveness of others is inextricably linked.<sup>29</sup> And if that is the correct interpretation (which most commentators suggest), then the apparent discrepancy vanishes.

What doesn’t vanish, however, is the sense that God takes sin very seriously. This is why the next petition is for God to

### ***“Lead Us Not Into Temptation...”***

The fact that God takes sin so seriously also helps us understand why Jesus came.

There are several different ways the Bible describes sin, several different words that are used to convey different nuances. Sometimes sin is described as a crime or transgression against God’s Law. At other points it’s depicted as an act of enmity or hostility that creates distance between us and our Creator. In verse 12, the word used is “debts.” What is a debt? A debt is an obligation owed to another. Most of the time we think of debts in financial terms, but sometimes what is owed is not monetary. There are moral debts, for example.

Think about it like this. Imagine a boy walks into the donut store down the road and begins looking intently at all the delicious options. He finally settles on one. It’s fresh and covered in sprinkles. They bag it up and the woman at the register informs him, “That will be one dollar.” At this point a look of distress takes over his face. His eyes start watering. His lip starts quivering. He reaches in his pocket and pulls out two quarters, which his mom gave him. He doesn’t have enough cash. He’s fifty cents short. What would you do? Of course, you would reach in your pocket and pay what the kid owes. The employee has to accept your payment because it’s legal tender. In that way you have satisfied the boy’s debt. He leaves with a smile on his face, inhaling half the donut before he even reaches the exit.

Let’s consider an alternate ending. What if the boy grabbed the donut and, knowing he couldn’t afford it, makes a run for it, bolting out the door. Problem is, once outside, he stumbles right into the arms of a

police officer. Why that police officer would be at a donut shop, I know not. He brings the boy in. He returns the stolen goods. He hears the accounts of the witnesses. And as this plays out, you're afraid this kid's going to get locked up in the slammer for some reason, so you reach in your pocket, pull out a dollar, put it on the counter, and say to the cashier, "Look, don't press any charges, I'll pay what the boy owes." This time the cashier can refuse. Why? Because the debt is not monetary, it's moral.

Now, it's an imperfect analogy, but perhaps it will help you understand your situation before God. You have sinned against Him. You have disobeyed Him. You've ignored Him. You've taken credit for things He alone deserved glory for. You've run out of His presence with stolen goods. You've sinned daily in thought, word, and deed. And Matthew calls that sin debt. Debt has to be paid. If it's not paid then the debtor incurs the consequences or the sin. The Bible says the wages of sin is death. That's what you deserve for your sin against a holy God. You deserve to die. You deserve to be spiritually cast out from His presence for all eternity.

When you realize this, it should terrify you. Anyone in his or her right mind would begin thinking about how to pay off the debt. The problem is, you don't have anything in your pockets to pay the debt. It's a moral debt and you can't be moral enough. The standard is perfection and you missed the mark. And there is no one around you who can pay the debt for you; they all have their own debt problem that they're trying to settle with God as well. And since you can't pay for your debts, God would be completely just to cast you aside to rot for all eternity in hell. That's the bad news.

But the good news, the "gospel" as we call it, is that God does something unheard of for sinners. He becomes a man, the person of Jesus. The Son of God took on our humanity. He lives the life you should have lived. He lays down His life on the cross in your place. He takes upon Himself your debt that you owed and He endures all the consequences that a failure deserves. He rises from the dead, conquering death and demonstrating the sufficiency of His work to satisfy the debt that sinners owe. And He invites us to come to God in faith, through Him, and receive the forgiveness that only He can offer. If we do—turning from our sin and trusting in Christ alone for salvation—our debt is paid by Jesus. Our slate forever wiped clean. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Why? Because He paid for that condemnation. He experienced that condemnation, in your place, so that you wouldn't have to. Your debt has been paid by Christ.

For those of you who have received that through faith, the only appropriate response is to forgive as you have been forgiven. No one owes you any debt that compares to what you owed to God and had Christ pay. As John Stott put it, "Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offense against God, the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling. If, on the other hand, we have an exaggerated view of the offenses of others, it proves we have minimized our own."<sup>30</sup> So don't linger in hypocrisy and withhold grace and mercy from others.

For those of you who have not received that saving gift from Jesus, you need to know that His work alone can make you right with God. As long as you are trying to earn God's favor and forgiveness, you will never obtain it. But when you come to the end of yourself and realize you need to be saved from sin by another, then you can look up and see the pierced hand of Jesus ready to make things right. How will you respond to this good news? Will you stubbornly persist in your sin and self-righteous attempts at pleasing God? The Apostle Paul said that such people are just storing up wrath (debt) for the day of wrath. "Every day that you linger in this life without falling on your knees and asking God to forgive you of your debts, you increase the treasury of wrath... We are debtors, who cannot pay our debts, and when that debt is called in, it will be the most severe crisis that you can imagine if you must pay it yourself."<sup>31</sup> And He could call up those accounts today! But there is another way, "the Way," and His name is Jesus. If you will turn to Him and trust in Him alone, He would save you. He will do it today! Have you considered that may be why God has you here today?



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<sup>1</sup> Joe Thorn, *Experiencing the Trinity: The Grace of God for the People of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 57.

<sup>2</sup> Luther, “Personal Prayer Book,” 29. R. C. Sproul tells the story behind this book: “Years ago there was a barber named Peter who made his living cutting hair and shaving faces. One day as he was cutting the hair of a customer, he looked up and saw a man come in the door whom he recognized immediately as an outlaw, one with a large bounty on his life. When the outlaw got into the barber’s chair, the barber put the apron on him and then, taking out the sharpest knife he had, applied soap to the man’s chin and neck and pressed the razor to his jugular vein. Just a little more pressure and the reward would be his. However, the barber had no intention of even nicking his client in the neck, because the barber had profound respect for his customer. The outlaw was Martin Luther, and the barber saw Martin Luther not as an outlaw but as his mentor. One day when the barber was shaving Martin Luther, he said to him, ‘Dr. Luther, can you teach me how to pray?’ Luther said, ‘Of course, Master Peter. I’d be happy to do that.’ When the shave was finished, Martin Luther went back to his cell and wrote a book just for his barber entitled *A Simple Way to Pray*. Everyone should read that book. It is the best book I have ever read on prayer. Luther’s simple suggestion was to pray the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. He did not mean that we should get down on our knees and recite the law, the creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. Luther meant that if we really want to learn how to pray, we must focus on the things that God reveals in His law, in the creed, and in the Lord’s Prayer. Luther would pray, ‘You, Lord, are the one who brought your people out of the land of bondage. You are a God who is so offended by idolatry in every form that you have told us not to allow any other gods before you. May we never tolerate in our hearts the very presence of an idol that would tarnish the glory that belongs to You.’ Luther would take the Apostles’ Creed and pray, ‘Oh, Lord, I am so grateful that I can call you ‘Father’ and that you are not the Father impotent or the Father abusive, but you are the Father almighty. There is no power or force in this universe that can resist the power of your word. It is by your word, God, that the heavens and the earth were made, by which you said, ‘Let there be light,’ and the lights came. My soul is overcome when I consider the work of your hands, the sun and the moon and all that you have ordained, and I am forced to ask the question, What is man that you are mindful of him? Or the son of man that you visit him?’ That is what Luther meant by praying the Lord’s Prayer. Rather than praying, ‘Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name,’ he would say, ‘Oh, God, I have not regarded your name as holy, because I have not regarded you as holy. I live in the midst of a people that think nothing of using your name in an irreverent manner. God, I know that your kingdom and your will won’t be done on this earth as it is in heaven until or unless we begin to exalt the majesty of your name.’” R. C. Sproul, *Matthew* (SAEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 138-139.

<sup>3</sup> Keller, 110.

<sup>4</sup> Grant Osborne, *Matthew* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 232.

<sup>5</sup> These insights were picked up from a very helpful roundtable discussion between D. A. Carson, Timothy Keller, and John Piper. They offer some additional wisdom on the matter for those interested. The fuller discussion can be viewed, as of July 3, 2015, here: <https://vimeo.com/100309195>.

<sup>6</sup> John Stott makes the same point: “As He is already holy so He is already King, reigning in absolute sovereignty over both nature and history.” John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 147; cf. Psalm 24:1.

<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7* (MNTC; Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 381.

<sup>8</sup> Sproul, 152. He credits these insights to John Calvin.

<sup>9</sup> Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 181.

<sup>10</sup> Keller writes, “If we can’t say, ‘thy will be done’ from the bottom of our hearts, we will never know any peace. We will feel compelled to try to control people and control our environment and make things the way we believe they ought to be. Yet to control life like this is beyond our abilities, and we will just dash ourselves upon the rocks.” Keller, 113.

<sup>11</sup> Luther, “Personal Prayer Book,” 32.

<sup>12</sup> Thorn, 57-58. He continues: “This is gospel confidence: In Jesus Christ God welcomes you as his child, and he watches over you and cares for you with not only good intentions, but also with successful actions. He even numbers the hairs of your head. This means that no detail of your life and existence escapes God’s attention, just as the life and death of each individual sparrow is accounted for in the sovereign care of the Lord. But you are no bird. You have far greater value as a person both made in God’s image and adopted as a child through Jesus. The Lord is your Father, and as such his eyes are fixed on you in the midst of all you must go through.” *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>13</sup> The “daily” aspect of this petition creates situation where prayer will need to be frequent, at the very least daily. This may speak to the regularity of a healthy prayer life that Jesus desires to see in His followers. That the focus here is on “daily bread” does not suggest that prayers concerning things that rise above the level of “necessity” are not ever appropriate to pray for. We should pray about everything (cf. Philippians 4:6). It’s all in how we pray. Paul E. Miller has a wonderful discussion on this in his book, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*. He points out that we often “balk at praying, *God, I want a vacation home. Would you get me one?*” and yet “We don’t mind *acting* selfishly, but *talking* selfishly is embarrassing. After all, we aren’t little children anymore. A vacation home is so beyond the purview of daily bread that it

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feels presumptuous to ask God for one. So what do we do instead of asking God for a vacation home? We look at our finances, talk to a realtor, and go buy one—all without seriously praying about the decision. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying buying a vacation house is inherently sinful. God delights in giving his children good gifts, including vacation homes. But he wants to be part of all the decisions we make. He wants our material needs to draw us into our soul needs. This is what it means to abide—to include him in every aspect of our lives. *Abiding* is a perfect way to describe a praying life. For example, many Christians who are thinking of buying a vacation home might even pray, asking God practical questions, such as 'Can we afford it?' 'Will it be too much work?' 'Should we make an offer on this house?' These are good questions. But we seldom ask God heart questions such as 'Will a second home elevate us above people?' 'Will it isolate us?' In the first set of questions, God is your financial adviser. In the second set, he has become your Lord. You are abiding. You are feeding your soul with food that lasts. We can do the same thing with a promotion. It feels selfish to pray for one, so instead we'll work for one! We end up separating a big part of our lives from God because we are trying to feel good about ourselves. As we have seen, we create two selves—a spiritual self and a material self. We also shy away from prayers like these because they invite God to rule our lives. They make us vulnerable.... Oddly enough, we can also use prayer to keep God distant. We do that by only talking to God and not to mature believers. I can demonstrate that easily. Which is easier, confessing impure thoughts to a mature friend or to God? The friend is tougher. That feels real. We need to ask the body of Christ, Jesus' physical presence on earth, the same questions we ask God. If you isolate praying from the rule of Jesus by not involving other Christians, you'll end up doing your own will. Many Christians isolate their decision making from the body of Christ, then further isolate themselves in their vacation homes. They say something like this: 'Well, my husband and I prayed about it, and the Lord seemed to confirm it.' Possibly God did confirm it. It is also possible that you used prayer as a spiritual cover for 'doing your own thing.' We can mask our desires even from ourselves." Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009), 142-144. I would recommend the entire book for those seeking a practical resource to aid their prayer lives.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Timothy 6:9-10 adds, "those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."

<sup>15</sup> See Miller, 141.

<sup>16</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Matthew* (SAEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 156.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel M. Doriani, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Character of a Disciple* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2006), 134-135.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>19</sup> That was said in a sermon with the clever title, "Sweet 'Our' of Prayer," preached on January 4, 1987, at Bethlehem Baptist Church.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Keller, *Prayer*, 114. Building on Martin Luther, *Luther's Larger Catechism*, trans. F. Samuel Janzow (St. Louis: Concordia, 1978), 92.

<sup>22</sup> Luther, 92.

<sup>23</sup> "We don't pray only for our own bread, but for bread for those who have none. As people longing to maintain right relationships with others, we take others' need of bread into consideration: we share what we have with others who have need. If every person, business, institution, and government worked according to the purposes and principles of God's kingdom, no one would be hungry." Author unknown, *Theology of Work Bible Commentary, Volume 4: Matthew through Acts*, 21-22.

<sup>24</sup> John Calvin once wrote, "If we retain feelings of hatred in our hearts, if we plot revenge and ponder any occasion to cause harm, and even if we do not try to get back into our enemies' good graces, by every sort of good office deserve well of them, and commend ourselves to them, by this prayer we entreat God not to forgive our sins." John T. McNeill, ed. *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1960), 3.20.45, 912.

<sup>25</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959-1960), 347.

<sup>26</sup> In commenting on the Parable of Matthew 18, D. A. Carson comments: "The point of the parable it seems does not so much turn on temporal sequence (X must forgive Y before Z can forgive X) as on attitude. There is no forgiveness for the one who does not forgive. How could it be otherwise? His unforgiving spirit bears strong witness to the fact that he has never repented." Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5-10* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 75.

<sup>27</sup> David L. Turner, *Matthew* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 188-189. The same sentiment is expressed by Grant Osborne, "It is not that our forgiveness is the basis of divine forgiveness...but rather that as we experience being pardoned by God, we must exercise in a greater willingness to pardon others. We are changed and strengthened by God's love, enabling us to have the enabling power to do it ourselves." Osborne, 230. The puritan writer Thomas Manton said, "There is none so tender to others as they which have received mercy themselves, for they know how gently God hath dealt with them" (quoted in John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7* [MNTC; Chicago: Moody Press, 1985], 395). Then there is N. T. Wright, "The heart that will not open to forgive others will remain closed when God's own forgiveness is offered." Wright, 60.

<sup>28</sup> Lloyd-Jones explains it this way: "...our Lord here was simply concerned to remind us of the need for forgiveness and to assure of the fact of forgiveness. He is not so much concerned about the mechanism or the way of forgiveness here, any more than He is in the parable of the Prodigal Son. We must take our Scriptures as a whole and compare Scripture with Scripture... What we have here is what we find so clearly taught in Matthew 18, in the parable of the steward who would not

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forgive his underling although he had been forgiven by his master. It means that the proof that you and I are forgiven is that we forgive others. If we think that our sins are forgiven by God and we refuse to forgive somebody else, we are making a mistake; we have never been forgiven. The man who knows he has been forgiven, only in and through the blood of Christ, is a man who must forgive others. He cannot help himself. If we really know Christ as our Saviour our hearts are broken and cannot be hard, and we cannot refuse forgiveness....The thing is absolute and inevitable. True forgiveness breaks a man, and he must forgive.” Lloyd-Jones, 348-349. Similarly, Charles Quarles explains things this way: “Both the conclusion to the model prayer and the parable of the Unforgiving Slave clearly teach that gracious forgiveness of others is a condition for receiving forgiveness from God in final judgment. Personal forgiveness is not a meritorious work that somehow earns divine forgiveness. However, the willingness to forgive others graciously is a hallmark of the true disciple of Jesus. Jesus’ disciples are ‘sons of God’ (5:9). The sons of God manifest the character of their heavenly Father much as sons resemble their earthly fathers. Because God is characterized by mercy (Exod 34:6) that compels Him to forgive sinners, His children will also show mercy to others and graciously forgive those who sin against them (Matt 5:7, 43-48). Furthermore, as discussed in the section of 5:7, repentance is a requirement for divine forgiveness. Those who are truly repentant will express to others the same mercy they hope God will lavish on them.” Charles Quarles, *Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ’s Message to the Modern Church* (NACSBT; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 212. Phil Newton’s remarks are also helpful: “If there is any degree of merit implied on the part of the one forgiving others in order to be forgiven, then the forgiveness for which we apply before God’s throne is not totally a work of grace, and we therefore have room to boast before God. Rather the point of the statement insists upon forgiveness being more than a legal transaction. Forgiveness affects one’s character, attitude, and disposition. To be forgiven implies that you have humbled yourself before God, repented of your sin, and cast yourself upon God’s graciousness. Can you maintain an unforgiving spirit toward others when you have so humbled yourself before the Lord? The insistence of our Lord is ‘absolutely not’” (From a sermon preached to South Woods Baptist Church on October 13, 2002, titled, “The Lord’s Prayer: Forgiveness”). R. C. Sproul offers this comment: “With respect to this petition we are told to ask God to ‘forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.’ The best commentators tell us at this point that if were to take this literally, we would be finished, because if God forgave us in exact proportion to how we forgive others, we would perish. Thank God that this is an aspiration rather than a condition. Jesus is teaching us to aspire to reflect the kindness of God and to be ready to forgive anyone who has sinned against us or offended us when he repents.” Sproul, 164. The above examples, though at time repetitive, serve to reinforce the general consensus that these texts are teaching (or at the very least assuming) that divine forgiveness ushers in human forgiveness in our lives.

<sup>29</sup> Scot McKnight writes, “In our faith we are taught that the *real* #1 is God has forgiven us, so the *real* order, and implied by Jesus [presumably by the fact the prayer begins with the address “Our Father”], is this:

1. God has graciously forgiven us (of much greater sin/s).
2. Therefore, we are to forgive others to extend God’s grace.
3. If we don’t forgive others, we show we are not forgiven.
4. Forgiven people forgive others.
5. But our forgiveness does not earn God’s forgiveness.

These five points can be taken as a rough-and-ready sketch of the process of how God’s gracious forgiveness finds a moral compass of forgiveness in the life of the follower of Jesus without compromising the priority of grace; I am confident it is consistent with the kingdom vision of Jesus, and it is confirmed by Matthew 18:23-35.” Scot McKnight, *Sermon on the Mount* (SGBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 183.

<sup>30</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (BST; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978), 149-150.

<sup>31</sup> Sproul, 161. He also provides a similar analogy, which I have modified for our purposes.