

Matthew: On Earth As It Is In Heaven

How to Pray, Part 1 * Matthew 6:9-13

Please take your Bibles and turn with me once again to Matthew 6. Some of you will be happy to know that my message today will be one of the shortest I have given here at Harmony. However, it won't be short because the topic is unimportant, but rather because I want us to have time to practice what we are going to learn. This means at the end of the message we are going to have a time of participation. I am going to ask all of you to join me in doing what Jesus tells us to do here in Matthew 6. And just so you know the ushers are now in the process of locking all the doors so there is no way out until the service is completely over. All joking aside, there is no reason to fear because I truly believe that the Holy Spirit is going to work in such a way over the next few moments that you are going to want to participate.

Review

With that said let me remind you that we are right in the middle of a three-week series on prayer. Last Sunday we studied what Jesus has to say about how not to pray, and this week and next we are going to see what He has to say about how to pray. And since last week's message is integral to what we will talk about today, let's quickly review its five major points.

Number one. We are not to pray to impress others.

Number two. We are not to pray mindlessly.

Number three. We are not to think we have to pray a lot in order to be heard.

Number four. We are not to think that prayer is primarily about asking God for what we need.

And number five. We are not to forget that God is our Father.

With those points in mind, let's read our text for today, verses 9-13 of Matthew 6.

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 6:9-13, ESV)

Of course, we commonly know this as the Lord's Prayer, but in all honesty it is better entitled the Disciple's Prayer – which is what I will call it throughout this message. I know I am going against 2,000 years of church history, but I do have a reason. I am not just trying to be difficult. I will call it the Disciple's Prayer because Jesus is very clearly telling us that this is the way in which we – His disciples – are to pray. It's not His prayer it's ours.

Now, you need to realize it is not possible for me to say anything about the Disciple's Prayer that hasn't been said by someone else. That's because this is one of the most familiar passages in the Bible. Most of us can recite it without even thinking and have heard more messages on it than we can count.

At the same time, there are at least six different sermons that could be given from this passage, and perhaps even more. However, my desire is not to bring out every single point that can be made from these verses, but rather to help you learn how to pray. That's because at the end of the day, this is what Jesus is trying to accomplish and I believe it is one of the greatest needs we have as believers. We desperately need to learn how to pray.

So, let me give my outline for the message. It's very simple. I am going to start by making some introductory points that will help lay the groundwork for understanding how to pray the Disciple's Prayer. Then I am going to walk you through the six petitions or requests that are found in the prayer.

Once that is accomplished I will conclude by directing you towards the attitude that this prayer, and every other prayer should be prayed in.

Introduction

1. The Disciple's Prayer is the way to pray.

Let's begin by laying some groundwork. First, we need to understand that the Disciple's Prayer is *the* way to pray. Jesus is not giving suggestions here He's giving direction.

Look at verse 9, Jesus says, "Pray then like this." The words "like this" mean that we may pray using other words but we should not pray for other things.¹ As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "The Lord's Prayer is not merely the pattern prayer, it is the way Christians must pray... The Lord's Prayer is the quintessence of prayer."²

I take Jesus' instruction to mean that we can use the Disciple's Prayer either as a guide for our prayers or we may simply recite the words as we think deeply about the implications of what they mean. My desire is to teach today in such a way that you learn how to do both.

2. The Disciple's Prayer is not about us.

Second, we must recognize that the Disciple's Prayer is not about us. The words I, me, and mine are absent in verses 9-13. Instead, the Disciple's Prayer is exceptionally God-centered. This is a great reminder that prayer is not primarily about getting what we need or want, but rather about drawing closer to the Lord and becoming more like Him.

3. The Disciple's Prayer is for us.

¹ Frederick Dale Bruner. *Matthew: A Commentary. Volume 1: The Christbook, Matthew 1-12* (Kindle Locations 5949-5951). Kindle Edition.

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, n.d.), p. 184.

That said, the third thing we need to know about the Disciple's Prayer is that it is *for* us. It's not about us, but it is for us. It's pretty easy to see that of the six petitions, the first three are directed toward God and the last three are directed toward our needs. And let me explain how these two parts work together. The last three requests serve the first three ones. In other words, we pray for food, forgiveness, and protection so that God may use us to bring glory to Himself. Perhaps an example from John Piper will help here. This is how he prays the Disciple's Prayer:

*My heart's desire is to be used by God for the hallowing of his name and the coming of his kingdom and the doing of his will. To that end I pray for Health—give me daily bread; Hope—forgive my debts; and Holiness—deliver me from evil.*³

So, while the Disciple's Prayer is not about us, it is for us to seek the Lord so that we might be used in a greater way for His glory. Now, let me say that this is probably the truth that has the most potential to change our prayer lives. I don't think we can truly learn to pray until we come to the understanding that the primary purpose of prayer is to draw us closer to the Lord so He might transform us into people who can be used in a greater way for His glory. I truly think until we understand and pray in this way, our prayers will always malfunction.

So, that's the introduction. Let's now take a look at the six requests found in the Disciple's Prayer.

The Six Requests of the Disciples Prayer

Request #1: God to be known for who He truly is.

Request number one is for God to be known for who He truly is. Look at verse 9:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

³ <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/our-deepest-prayer-hallowed-be-your-name>

Now, let's just admit that although we may have prayed this hundreds of times, most of us have no idea what the word *hallowed* means. It is an archaic word that no one uses any more. I mean, when was the last time you used the word "hallowed"? Ever? So what does it mean? Well, to hallow something means to regard it as important. And the thing that we are asking to be regarded as important is God's name. Now, this might still not completely make sense unless you understand what is indicated by "name". "Name" is referring to God's real identity as opposed to who people think He is. We know that people have lots of ideas about who God truly is today and so in this we request we are asking God to cause people to see and appreciate Him for who He really is. But it's not simply about seeing and understanding – it's ultimately about worship. At the bottom line, this is a request that God will make Himself known as God and that all people will worship Him as such.

Please note that this request is first for a reason – it's first because this is why God does everything that He does; to make Himself known so that all people will worship Him. But let's take this one step further. This is also the reason that you and I exist – to worship Him. And therefore keeping this truth at the very forefront of our prayers is extremely crucial. It helps us to continually focus on the reason God does everything He does, as well as the reason we should do everything we do. And this, my friends is the greatest need of humanity. To see God for whom He truly is and in response to fall down and worship Him with everything we are. Once again, it's not about us, its all about Him.

Request #2: God's kingdom to come.

Request number two is for God's kingdom to come. In order to understand this request you have to keep in mind what the kingdom is. As we saw earlier in Matthew, the kingdom is the rule and reign of the King. And who is the King? I have asked this over and over again in our study of Matthew, and the answer is always the same. The King is Jesus. And so the kingdom is found wherever King Jesus is ruling and reigning.

Now, we have also learned that the kingdom is both already and not yet. By that I mean that the kingdom has already come, but it has not come in all its fullness. The kingdom is found today in the hearts and lives of those who have submitted to Jesus as King. However, we know that not everyone has submitted to Him. But a day is coming when that will be the case. There will be a day when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. And on that day we will experience the kingdom in its fullness here on earth.

So, in this request we are both asking for the kingdom to be experienced more and more today – we are asking that more and more people will submit to Jesus as their Lord and Savior – and we are also asking that Jesus will come again and establish His kingdom once and for all here on this earth.

Now let me say that I think Jesus wants us to primarily be looking towards His return. I say this because the earliest recorded prayer of the church outside of the New Testament was a very simple one taken from the next to last verse of the Bible, Revelation 22:20. In fact, it was one Greek word – *Maranatha* –, which means, “Come, Lord Jesus!” And it is “come, Lord Jesus” with an exclamation point. It is a prayer to be prayed with urgency and excitement. You see the early church believed that Jesus was going to return at any moment and they longed for this to happen. But let me ask, what about us? Are we longing for Jesus’ return? Are we looking forward to it? Let me just say, if we aren’t, something is seriously wrong. If we aren’t longing for that day when Jesus will open the sky, split the clouds and return in all His glory, we are missing the whole point of what life is all about. And I think Jesus knew that we would struggle with this, and so in the Disciple’s Prayer He includes it to remind us to continually be looking for His return.

Request #3: God’s will to be done.

Request number three is for God’s will to be done. Look at verse 10 again:

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

To understand this request we have to recognize that there are two different aspects of God's will. On the one hand there is God's secret will, which is His providential governance of all things. This includes all the events of history that He ordains and brings about. It is called His secret will because we as humans don't always see and understand how He is working. On the other hand, we have God's revealed or moral will, specifically as it is disclosed in Scripture. God's revealed will describes how He wants humans to live.⁴

Here in the Disciple's Prayer, Jesus is referring to God's revealed will, and is telling us to ask for this will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Everyone in heaven follows God's revealed will perfectly. But as we all very clearly know, that is not the case here on earth. It one day will be, but until that time we are to pray for His will to be done more and more, and specifically, I would suggest, in our own lives. When you pray for God's will to be done on earth, always have in mind that this needs to be directed first and foremost to yourself.

Request #4: Daily provision.

Request number four is for daily provision. Verse 10:

Give us this day our daily bread.

Bread here includes not only food but also everything we need for physical sustenance. And we could talk about this for a long time, but let me simply point out three important things.

First, this is a request for needs, not wants. Scripture never encourages us to pray, nor gives any examples of praying for creature comforts. One of the

⁴ Grudem, Wayne. 2000. Pg. 332. *Systematic Theology*. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

reasons prayer malfunctions is that we too often pray for things that we don't need and fail to pray for what we actually do need. In fact, here is a good test. Do you pray more for what you want or for what you need?

Second, note that this is a *daily* prayer. I think this is to be taken literally. We are to ask God every day to meet our needs. Now to be honest, I find this difficult, as I would guess you do. It's difficult because most of us have never gone without our basic needs. Most of us have never been in a place where we haven't had three square meals, a warm bed, and more clothes than we know what to do with. And so here we find another reason to pray this prayer regularly, because it reminds us that we have what we have because God has chosen to graciously give these things to us. You do know, don't you, that everything you possess is a gift from God? You have what you have because of Him, not because of you. And therefore we need to develop hearts of gratitude, and one of the ways we do so is by regularly reminding ourselves through prayer that God is the one who meets our needs.

Third, making this request helps us to remember those who don't have bread. As we sit here today, some of us even at this very moment thinking about what we are going to have for lunch, there are hundreds of millions of people struggling to find a single piece of bread so that they can have something – anything – to eat today. This week I read a quote from William Barclay that was very convicting on this point. He said:

No Christian can be content to have too much while others have too little. – William Barclay

A lot more can be said on this point, as on the others, but let me just make mention that all six of these requests should spur us to action. They aren't just words we should pray, they are deep theological truths that should change the way we live.

Request # 5: Forgiveness.

Request number five is for forgiveness. Verse 12:

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Now, three weeks ago we studied the topic of forgiveness in detail, so I won't belabor the point here. Rather, I will simply point you to the fact that Jesus is stressing the importance that confession plays in our prayers. Jesus does not have in mind the prayer of forgiveness that leads to salvation, but rather the prayer of confession that leads to cleansing from our daily sins. It's the prayer of 1 John 1:9:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9, ESV)

Now, this is the kind of prayer we like the least. We don't like to think about our sin and we like to admit it even less. However, confessing our sins is absolutely essential to our prayers being heard. Notice what Psalm 66 tells us:

If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. (Psalm 66:18, ESV)

If you wonder why it seems that God isn't answering your prayers, it may be that you are holding on to sin and refusing to let it go.

If you want a very helpful passage on how to confess your sin, I would point you to Psalm 51. This is a great passage where David repents of his sin with Bathsheba and is a great model for how to confess and turn from our sin.

Request #6: Protection.

The sixth and final request is for protection. Take a look at verse 13:

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

On the surface this looks like we are to pray that God will not tempt us. However, we know from James 1:13 that this cannot be the case. Therefore, this is a request that God will protect us in the midst of temptation. That He will not lead us into temptation, but rather through it.

Benjamin Franklin is famous for saying that in this world nothing can be certain except death and taxes. While that might be true I think Mr. Franklin missed at least one thing – temptation, something that everyone of us faces every single day. Many of us are facing it right now. I have shared with some of you that I even face temptation while I am preaching. And why do we constantly face temptation? We constantly face temptation because we are in a war. I know that on the outside everything looks nice and peaceful today – but in reality we are smack dab in the middle of a war against the extremely powerful forces of the world, the flesh, and the devil. And we have to, have to, have to understand that one of the primary weapons Jesus has given us to fight this war is prayer.

John Piper states in his book *Let the Nations Be Glad* that “we can’t know what prayer is for until we know that life is war.”⁵ In other words, until we understand that our very life is at stake every single minute of every single day, we will never pray as we should.

So listen. We have to wake up and realize what is at stake. It’s nothing less than our faith, our family, and the community and world we live in. We have to realize that we are in wartime not in peacetime. We have to recognize that if God doesn’t protect us we will be utterly destroyed by the evil one. He truly is a roaring lion who is constantly looking for someone to devour. Christian’s we have to wake up and realize what’s going on!

Now you might think I am being overly dramatic. But I am not. And I can prove this by pointing you to the word *deliver* in verse 13, which is a violent term that literally means *to snatch*. Jesus is telling us that here in this world we are within the grasp of the devil and we need to pray that God will do whatever it takes to snatch us from Him.

⁵ Piper, John (1993). Pg. 41. *Let the Nations be Glad*. Grand Rapids, MI. Baker Books.

Now, don't be mistaken – the ultimate outcome of the war has long been decided. But that does not mean there aren't very important battles yet to be fought, battles in which we are in extreme danger. And therefore we need to pray for God's protection as we wage war here in this time and place.

Conclusion – The Attitude of Prayer

So, those are the six requests. Let's wrap up our study of the Disciple's Prayer by talking about the attitude in which we should pray. As we talked about last week, at the end of the day prayer is all about what is going on in our heart. It's not about a place, a position, an amount, or even about the right words. It's all about the attitude of our heart. And so what is the right heart attitude for prayer? Well, for this I want to take you back to the very first words of the Disciple's Prayer. How does the prayer begin? Say it with me: *Our Father in heaven*. These four words are key to having the right attitude in prayer, because they remind us of two truths. First, they remind us that God is a generous, loving, merciful Father who desires to give us every good thing. And we will talk more about this next week, but once again just marvel with me at the amazing fact that we can call God our Father. This is the most amazing gift a human being can receive and because of it we can go confidently before God in prayer. That's the first part of the attitude we should have in prayer – confidence.

At the same time, these words also remind us of God's power and authority. He is our Father who is *in heaven*. This means that although He is with us, He is also above us. When we pray *our Father*, we are reminded of His tender-loving ever-present care. But when we pray *in heaven*, we are directed to the fact that He is also all knowing, all present, and all powerful, which should produce in us a humility that keeps us from taking His Fatherhood for granted.

And that is the balance we need to strike in prayer. We need to boldly come before our Father in humility. We need to remember that we can always come before Him – but only because of His mercy and grace.

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