

# ***“Lord, Teach Us to Pray”***

**MATTHEW 6:9-13**

**Baxter T. Exum (#1178)  
Four Lakes Church of Christ  
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Over the past two weeks, we have been looking at various acts of worship. We started two weeks ago by thinking about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11. Last Sunday, we started looking at a passage on prayer from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6. We learned last week that our lives are to match up with the prayers that we offer. We learned that we are not to pray in such a way that we attract attention to ourselves (that's not what prayer is about). And then we learned that we are to avoid meaningless repetition, and the reason for that is: God already knows exactly what we need even before we ever think to ask.

This morning, I would like for us to continue thinking about prayer as we look at the second part of that passage, as we consider the next five verses from Matthew 6 (p. 1509). In another passage (in Luke), the disciples came up to the Lord and said, ***“Lord, teach us to pray,”*** and in response to that request, the Lord gave what is sometimes referred to as being the “Lord's Prayer.” That same basic prayer is also found here in Matthew 6. I don't know if you know this or not, but when preachers have to preach in two different places, they will often use the same material – we don't need to reinvent the wheel if we're preaching to two different groups. In my own family, I usually try to give my kids a little bonus in their allowance, as a way of apologizing for them listening to the same material twice – but it seems to me that the Lord did the same thing. So, what is commonly referred to as the “Lord's Prayer” is found in Luke 11 and also here in Matthew 6.

And as we get started, I would point out that the Lord is not giving us an actual prayer to pray. In fact, I would point out (as I mentioned last week) that this is the one prayer we know without a doubt that the Lord never prayed, and I hope that some of you figured out why (that was the homework assignment for this morning). The way we know that this is a sample and not a real prayer is that the Lord prayed for forgiveness! As the perfect Son of God, Jesus never needed to be forgiven of anything, so we are reminded that this is not an actual prayer that the Lord prayed, but it is a sample, or a template. So, although it is commonly referred to as the “Lord's Prayer,” that is not entirely accurate. The real “Lord's Prayer” is actually found in John 17 as the Lord prayed for the unity of His disciples (that would be us) on the night before He died.

And that brings me to something else: Not only did the Lord never actually pray this prayer, but WE are not to actually pray this prayer. I know we haven't read the passage yet, but since your Bibles are open, please notice how the Lord starts out here, ***“Pray, then, in this way...”*** In other words, He did not say, “Pray, then, this prayer,” but He said, ***“Pray then, in this way.”*** We might say, then, that this prayer is not something to be

repeated over and over again (remember, He just warned about meaningless repetition in the previous paragraph), but this prayer is more of a template. If you've ever done any word processing, then you know what a template is. If you are making a resume, for example, you open a template, a pattern, and then you have to fill it in with your own information, you have to personalize it. Imagine, though, printing out the template and sending it in to try to get a job. That would be just about as ridiculous as actually praying the "Lord's Prayer." The prayer here in Matthew 6 is a pattern, a template, a sample.

With this in mind, let us please look together at Matthew 6:9-13,

- 9 "Pray, then, in this way:  
'Our Father who is 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 do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
[For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. ']**

Again, I would like for us to consider this prayer not as an actual prayer to be prayed, but as a template, as a sample prayer. And before we get into specifics, did you notice how simple it was? You may have something a little different based on your translation, but I counted a grand total of 68 words. I read it this morning and timed it – it came out to only 21 second! Not only that, but these are rather simple words. They are simple words arranged in a simple way. I cut and pasted this text and took it online to some websites that specialize in analyzing various samples of writing to give you advice, to tell you what grade level you're writing on, and to help you be a better writer. The prayer contains only 8 sentences with an average of just under 4 characters per word. The words in the prayer have an average of only 1.43 syllables per word. Can you guess the grade level? I know this is not an exact science, but the analysis shows that you need to be somewhere between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in order to understand the Lord's Prayer. To me, that is amazing!

With this in mind, I want us to look at this prayer in terms of four very basic categories, four very basic things that we need to keep in mind as we pray.

- I. **And first of all, as we look at the Lord's template here, as we look at His example, we find an amazing concept, the revolutionary idea that PRAYER IS TO BE ADDRESSED TO OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN.**

As far as I can tell, no one ever addressed God as "**Father**" in the Old Testament. If you find something, please let me know. God is pictured as a Father-type figure a few times here and there (almost in a passing kind of way), perhaps in a national sense, but never personally. As far as I can tell, no one in the Old Testament ever addressed God directly as "**Father.**" And so when the Lord told them to pray by saying "**Our Father,**" that was a revolutionary concept. To many, it would have been blasphemous. We can almost hear people gasping in the audience: He just called God His Father, and He's telling us to do the same! As those who fear God, we can address Him as "**Our Father.**"

In that one statement, the Lord was telling us that God wants to hear from us. As earthly fathers, don't we

love hearing from our children? I love it when my kids come into my office just to talk about something. They don't need to have a crisis. They don't have to need something. But sometimes they come in just to say hello. As I see it, that is what prayer is all about: As children, we talk to our Father in Heaven. And as Christians, we have a relationship with God that others do not have. As Christians, we are God's children. I think about how I interact with my children's friends who come over to our house for whatever reason. We talk, and I obviously try to take care of them while they're over at our house. Sometimes all of us have a lot of fun together. Down in Janesville, several of the neighborhood kids came over, and I helped them build a giant igloo right there in the middle of our front yard. They would watch me mow the grass with the old push-reel mower, and they would beg to take a turn. We love the kids in the neighborhood, but they do not call me "dad." I am nice to them, and they are respectful to me, but my own children have access to me 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. I am their father, and my own children are my priority. And as a father, I love hearing from my own children.

But think about this for just a moment: As earthly fathers, wouldn't we be devastated to learn years later that our children didn't talk to us because they were too scared or because they didn't know how to do it? That would be horrible! And so, as our Father, God wants to hear from us. Prayer, then, is not an empty ritual, but it is a conversation between a Father and His children.

At this point in my life, even as an adult, I still have the privilege of calling my own mom and dad from time to time – even though I'm not calling for money like I might have done in college! I try to call and check in maybe once a week or so, and I don't really need a reason. I may not even have anything very specific I need to talk about, but I just enjoy talking to mom and dad, and we might just talk for half an hour or maybe an hour, just to let them know how I'm doing, just to see how they're doing. In the same way, we also talk to God because He is our Father.

We might be having a good week. Things might be going very well. On the other hand, we might be having a bad week. We might not have all of the money to pay the rent. Our kids may be sick. We may be having trouble at work. But God is our Father! It is a personal, intimate relationship, and we can share what we're going through.

But please notice, connected to this, that the Lord adds something. Yes, God Almighty is our Father (an amazing concept), but then He says, "**Hallowed be Your name.**" He is our Father, but He is also holy. He is our Father, but He is still God – there is a level of respect that we are to have for God in our prayers. We remember the words of King Solomon in Ecclesiastes 5:2, "**Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.**" And so, perhaps like we do with our earthly fathers, we can speak with them openly, but we must also speak with respect. As we pray, we are to acknowledge God for who He is. He is holy, He is separate, He is God. But the first idea here is that we approach God as our Father.

**II. There is a second basic concept in this sample prayer, and that is: The Lord teaches that as we pray, WE ARE TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE KINGDOM.**

In verse 10, the Lord says, "**Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**" At the time this was first said, of course, the kingdom had not yet come. The kingdom is the church, and the church was not established until the Day of Pentecost (in Acts 2) in roughly 30 AD, seven weeks after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Today, then, we cannot accurately ask God for the kingdom to come, we cannot accurately pray this prayer word-for-word, because we are currently in the kingdom. It doesn't make sense to pray for something to come that is already here.

But let us please back up just a little bit, and let us consider this as more of a category. Remember, this is a template, a sample prayer. And so, knowing that the church is the kingdom, couldn't we take this as a reminder to pray for the church? We can pray for the spiritual health of this congregation. We can pray for this congregation to be overseen by faithful elders. We studied elders several months ago, and I personally cannot remember any of us praying publicly for elders since that series of lessons. That is concerning to me. As I see it, not having elders is the greatest weakness of this congregation. In a sense, we are wandering like sheep without shepherds. Wouldn't it make sense, then, to pray for elders? Are we afraid that God might actually answer that prayer? As we pray for the kingdom, we can pray, then for elders. We can pray for our own men and their families. We can pray that God might send us new families. We can pray for our efforts at outreach. Knowing that some First Century congregations were established and then appointed elders only three years later, we can pray that we can find a man in this community who doesn't know about us yet, who is not yet a Christian, that he might be qualified to serve as an elder in a few years.

But beyond this, we can pray for the spiritual health of the congregation in general. We can pray for deeper fellowship. We can pray for unity. We can pray that we will continue to get along together as a Christian family. We can pray for the Lord's kingdom around the world. We can pray for the work being done by Brett and Joanne Rutherford right now in Australia. We can pray for other congregations around the state of Wisconsin. We can pray for individual members of the kingdom who may be having a difficult time spiritually. We can pray for new Christians. We can pray for our older members. We can pray for the members of this congregation who are away at college. We may not be able to pray for the kingdom to come (since it is already here), but we can certainly remember God's kingdom in our prayers.

And then, on a more personal level, think about what the Lord says next – we are to pray that God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. Literally, we are asking that God's will would **"happen."** We are asking for God's will to be accomplished. And this is the kingdom idea: We are to be praying that God would rule in our lives, praying that we would be submissive subjects in His kingdom. This morning we sang about this, "You are King of creation and King of my life, King of the land and the sea. We bow down!" I don't think we can even consider this without thinking about the real "Lord's Prayer" on the night before He died, as He yielded His will to the will of His Father. And that is where we get back to the purpose of prayer. The purpose of prayer is not to get our will done in heaven but to get God's will done on earth. What we might want to happen is not necessarily what God wants to happen, and prayer sometimes helps us readjust our priorities. Prayer is not to be our way of asking for God's stamp of approval. As I was getting ready for the floor project in here, I went to Staples to get something to mark the new floor for where the pews need to be put back in, and I found these little Post-It notes that say "Sign Here." I got them, because they have a precise little arrow, and as we measure to put the pews back in here, I thought that might be a good way of getting things lined up for the pews to come back in. But then as I thought about this passage, I realized: It is very easy to go to God in prayer and lay out our concerns and then just basically ask God to "Sign Here." Lord, this is what I want to happen, and I just need your signature on this! I need your stamp of approval on what I'm already planning on doing.

I am reminded of the man trying to lose weight who really struggled not to stop by the donut shop on his way to work every morning. He did well for a week or so, but then he came in with a huge box of donuts. His coworkers questioned him about that, and he said, "These donuts are very special. As I was about to drive by the bakery, I wondered whether maybe the Lord wanted me to bring donuts this morning, so I prayed, 'Dear Lord, if you want me to stop and buy some donuts, then let there be a parking spot right there in front of the front door.'" It was always busy and always hard to get a parking spot, so the coworkers said, "Wow, so the spot opened up?" And the man replied, "Yes, it was a miracle! After only the eighth time driving around the block, there it was!" You see, there was a man who was simply looking for God's stamp of approval for

something that he was already going to do, no matter what. He just wanted God to “Sign Here.” In reality, though, we are to approach God just as subjects would approach a King – we want His will to be done. We want His kingdom to do well, ***“Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”***

III. **There is a third basic idea in this sample prayer, the idea that WE ARE TO RELY ON GOD FOR OUR DAILY NEEDS.**

Specifically, we are told in verse 11 to pray for our ***“daily bread.”*** Down through the years, there has been a lot of debate among the scholars concerning the meaning of ***“bread”*** as it is used here. Leave it to scholars to debate the meaning of bread! Some thought it was the bread of the Lord’s Supper. Others thought it referred to the word of God. Some have said that it referred to the Lord Himself, since He described Himself as being the ***“bread of life.”*** But most of the controversy goes back to the difficulty in translating the word that we have here as ***“daily.”*** One scholar from many years ago, in fact, actually thought that Matthew made up the word, because they hadn’t found this word in any other ancient documents, so they had nothing to compare it to in terms of context outside the New Testament. However, a number of years ago, archaeologists found this exact word on a small papyrus fragment from the time of Christ, and the fragment turned out to be someone’s shopping list! That small papyrus note was a reminder to purchase supplies for the following day. A year or so ago, Amy told me about a Post-It note app for my phone, and on one page I now keep a little shopping list on there – the things that I need today. That is the meaning of the word ***“daily,”*** and it is tied to ***“bread.”*** So, we are not talking about the Lord’s Supper, or Jesus, or the word of God here, but we are talking about the stuff that we might find on our daily shopping list, the kind of stuff that you might find at a Kwik Trip, the kind of stuff that we might write down on a little scrap of paper. I don’t know how it works in your family, but in our family if one of us is going out, we will ask on our way out the door, “Does anybody need anything?” And then we write it down, maybe on the back of an envelope. Those are the kinds of provisions we are talking about here, our ***“daily bread,”*** our milk, and bread, and coffee. The Lord is telling us here, then, that God cares about those things that are written on that list. He cares about those scribbles on that little piece of paper! Before we think that bread is too insignificant to bother God with, let us look at our list as we run out the door each day, and let us go to God in prayer! If you have a list in your pocket right now, I would invite you to pull it out. Look at that list on your i-phone. God cares about those things! He cares about the daily needs and concerns that we have.

We pray, therefore, for our ***“daily bread,”*** and as we pray we realize that we are completely dependent on God. In fact, it would be safe to say that none of us here this morning has ever had a single bite of food that wasn’t provided by God – even our most basic daily needs. Of course, here in this nation, we are not usually concerned about food on a daily basis. We might shop at Sam’s Club, we might shop at Woodman’s, and there are pallets of food spread out over what seems to be acres in those stores. As I was preparing this morning’s lesson, I went up to our kitchen, and I found a lot of food that goes far beyond what we need for today. I found a bag of whole-wheat flour that’s good through October 2013. I found a huge can of diced tomatoes that are good through April 2014. I found a can of black beans that are good through April 2017. I can hardly picture the year 2017 in my mind, but God has provided for us – He gives us our ***“daily bread,”*** and so much more!

IV. **As we come near the end of this template for prayer, we notice something else as we discover that THE LORD ADDRESSES SIN – we are told here to PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS, and we are told to PRAY FOR DELIVERANCE FROM TEMPTATION AND EVIL.**

And again, this is how we know that the Lord never actually prayed this prayer – the Lord never needed forgiveness for anything. But as it is, we DO need forgiveness. And specifically, we are told here that we are to pray that our debts might be forgiven. As we've studied before, the Bible describes sin in several ways. Sometimes sin is described as "missing the mark." We might aim to hit the target, we try to do the right thing, but we fail, we miss. There is another word that refers to defiantly stepping across a line that God has told us not to cross, the idea of transgression – God tells us not to do something, and we do it anyway. There are other times in the Bible where sin is described as slipping across the line. We don't start out trying to cross it, but out of weakness, we slip and fall and slide across the line. Sometimes the Bible refers to being "**caught**" in sin, almost like an animal caught in a trap. We're going through life minding our own business, and suddenly we are caught up in something we never expected, the trap snaps on us, and we are caught.

But here in this passage we have a different picture as sin is described as being a debt, in fact, being in so deep that we fail to pay what we owe. Maybe we can imagine a family so deep in credit card debt that it is literally impossible to ever get out – that is a miserable feeling. And yet, in several passages, the Bible explains that our sins have put us in a similar situation with God. Even with our very first sin, we racked up a balance so incredibly high that we are totally unable to ever pay it back. So, in this passage, we find that we are to pray for our spiritual debts to be forgiven.

But notice, we can pray for those debts to be forgiven only to the extent that we forgive those who sin against us! We didn't go past the actual prayer this morning, but in the next two verses, the Lord goes on to explain it a little better. If we forgive others, we will be forgiven, but if we do not forgive others, then our Father will not forgive us. The tendency, though, is for us to see what others have done to us as far worse than what we do to them. If I am late for something, for example, then I have been unavoidably detained, and you need to excuse that. If you are late for something, though, then you are completely unreliable, and I may never trust you again. If I forget your name, it's just because I'm not good with names. But if you forget my name, then it must be because you don't really care about me. It is very easy, then, to be tougher on others than we are on ourselves, but the Lord says here that we are to pray for forgiveness and that the Lord will forgive us only to the extent that we forgive others.

I know we've been talking about forgiveness here – we are talking about being forgiven for something we have done in the past, but please notice: The Lord also addresses the issue of avoiding sin in the future. In verse 13, "***And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.***" The idea is: We ask God to lead us in the right direction. On a daily basis, we ask God to keep us spiritually safe. We pray for protection from evil. A lot of times, we ask God to help us get out of some trouble that we've gotten into. Here we ask God to help us avoid trouble in the first place. And we find that God is not just a problem solver, but He is also a problem preventer.

Most of us are familiar with Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 10:13 as he talks about God always providing a way of escape from temptation. Here in this sample prayer, we find that we can ask God to help us find the way out. In so many situations, we get in the middle of it, and we think we have no choice, but we do have a choice. We can ask God to help us avoid the sin, and He has promised to provide a way out of it. There are no impossible situations.

### **Conclusion:**

So we find, then, that we come to God like children come to their Father. We pray for the growth and strength of God's kingdom. We pray for our daily bread our daily concerns. And we also come to God asking for

forgiveness. There is another little phrase here that I have not addressed. It does not seem to be in the oldest manuscripts. But I would like to say just a word or two on that word at the end, the word **"AMEN."** As you know, the word **"AMEN"** literally means, "truly," or "so be it," we are affirming that something is a true statement. You might be interested to know that when the Lord said, **"Truly, truly, I say to you..."** on several occasions, He was actually saying, **"Amen, Amen..."** He was affirming that what he was about to say was a true statement. And so when it comes to prayer, in our own family, we taught our kids that when you say **"amen"** after a prayer, it means that we are sharing a prayer. Someone else might be leading the prayer, but when we say **"AMEN,"** that is our way of saying, "Yes, I agree – that is my prayer too!" Jerome, a man who lived in the early 400's once said that, "...at the end of every public utterance of prayer and praise, the 'Amen' of the people sounded like the loud murmur of the sea, or the voice of thunder, while the hollow idols, and their temples that were empty, did echo and rebound with the churches' 'Amen' so that their fabrics shook."

With that in mind, notice that the Lord's sample prayer was offered on behalf of others. In a public prayer, we don't say "I" this and "I" that (that's what our closet is for), but like the Lord, if we are leading others, we refer to **"Our Father,"** we pray for **"our"** daily bread, and ask for **"our"** sins to be forgiven – we go to God together, and if we agree with what has been said, we all share the prayer by saying **"Amen"** at the end of it.

I am so thankful for your kind attention this morning, and I would invite you to join us at Elvehjem Park next Sunday morning as we look together at another act of worship.

The Bible teaches that we respond to God's offer of salvation by turning away from sin and by allowing ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our past sins. If you have any questions, we invite you to study with us, but if you are ready to obey the gospel this morning, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)