



## **Matthew 6:9-15**

### **“WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PRAY?”**

(Sermon Plus Study And Application Questions)

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### **“Following Christ at City Center!”**

**MATTHEW 6:9-15**  
**"WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PRAY?"**

9 [Jesus said] "Pray then like this:

Example of brief prayer, pray to Father thru the Son, topics to freely expand

Every phrase has Jewish parallels adapted by Jesus: utterly Jewish

Pagan prayers were long on invocation, short on petition; here the reverse is true

Prayer is a frank conversation between two friends, one much weaker & dependent

Jesus/disciples prayed before this prayer was composed, Mk. 1:35, 6:36, 11:35-42; Acts 3:1

**1. v.9b Relation To Addressee: Intimacy, Power, Liberator.**

*Our*, prayer for church together

*Abba* is central but not unique to Jesus; 11:25, Lk. 10:21, Mk. 14:36, Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:6

'Our Father

*Father in heaven*, 12:50, Mk. 11:25, Mishnah *Sota* 9:15, Qumran (4Q372 frag. 1)

*Our* means Jesus has made us family, *we* before *me*, public and communal, 12:50, Hos. 11:1

Yet, he is Son in a way we are not, Jn. 20:17, Mt. 3:17, 11:27, 17:5, 26:39

*Abba* is transcendent, not patriarchal; *Father* is not male; God as Spirit has no body

Invited to address God as did Jesus!! Radical trust. Not Caesar or Zeus as Father but Yahweh

**2. v.9c Location Of God: The Near One Remains Transcendent, Presence Not Fully Realized.**

Gk. is plural, God is present but utterly beyond and different from our world

who (art) in the heavens.

2 Levels of creation, Presumes that God hears this communal praying, Intimacy and awe

Mt. 6:33, Kingdom first, then other things// Decalogue, Mt. 22:34-40. 11:25-30

7 Core Petitions

**3. vv.9d-10b Three Parallel Thou Petitions: God's Lordship.**

First duties to God: Goal

//Kaddish 1, 4 (e.g. name, hallowing, kingdom, will, father in heaven)

Glory 1 Hallowed be thy *name*;

Circumlocution: God's holy reputation; Jn. 12:28, Ezek. 36:16-23, Lev. 22:32

10 2 thy kingdom come;

Unholiness defiles; World violates 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment, Is 6:3, 52:5, 29:23

Power 3 thy will be done,

Signs in Jesus; Future is previewed, 13:31-33, 43; 26:29. Is. 52:7-10

3 aorist imperatives are divine passives; implore God to defend, reign, enact

26:42, within each is an ethical call: circles of God's person, rule, will

3 calls to end history now; no improvements; future determines the present

Till then we pray, "Nourish us; clean us; protect us," 1 Cor. 15:25

We pray for what only God can do, vs. all human ideals, schemes, utopias

**2' v.10c Location Of The Ones Who Pray: On The Needy, Embattled Earth, Not In Heaven.**

Phrase applies to three former petitions, bridge to *we* petitions

on earth as it is in heaven.

*Heaven and earth* = Visible/invisible totality of creation, 5:18, 24:35

*Heaven* = God unchallenged (6:10); *Earth* = Contested Turf (6:19, 10:34)

Disciples call for the Father's immediate triumph in history. If not, why not?

**3' v.11-13a Three We/And Petitions: Basic Interim Needs.**

Then human needs: Means

Feed, Forgive, Defend us; survival needs, echoes meals of Jesus

11 Present 1 (4) Give us this day our *daily* bread.

Or, *our bread for tomorrow*, 11:19, Lk. 14:15, Num. 21:5, Ex.16:4

12 Past 2 (5) *And* forgives us our debts,  
as we also (now) have forgiven our debtors.

Abrupt move from transcendent to earthy; redundant *us, daily*, 1 Tim. 6:8

19:23ff., Mk. 11:25, not the sinless Jesus, 7:11, 3:14-15, Jn. 7:18

13 Future 3a (6) *And* lead us not into temptation,

Receive/share; no eye for eye, tit for tat; 1:21, Lev. 25

Forgiveness, 5:7, 23-25; 18:23-35; Lk. 6:37, Sirach 28:1-7, Lk. 23:34

26:41, No *the* before temptation; Jam. 1:21, 1 Cor. 10:13, Sirach 2:1, 33:1

Belly(bread), relations(forgiveness), cosmic (evil one, apostasy), Ex. 20:20

Physical strength(bread), Spiritual (forgiveness), Moral (temptation)

4:1-11 (Spirit led; Jesus tested), *peirasmos/poneros*, Lk. 22:31-32(Peter)

Matthew's Version Has 7 Petitions

**1') v.13b Adversity &/Or Adversary Named (Inclusion With Father).**

Jesus died for this prayer!

(7) but deliver us from the evil (or, *the Evil One*).

Western church (neuter noun, evil), Eastern (masculine noun, evil one)

Jarring Last Petition: *But*, Jewish usage both personal/impersonal

Didache 8:2-3, 3x daily(Jewish practice); stand (*Apostolic Constitutions* 7:24)

Ultimate threat is evil/Evil One, too strong to fight on our own, Jn. 17:15

**Doxology Found In Some Manuscripts: A Common End To Jewish Prayers.**

Ends with threefold praise

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Turns from Evil One to God!//1 Chron. 29:10ff.

**6:14-15 Conditional Commentary On v.12**

//Mk. 11:23-25, Lk. 17:3-6; Recalls 5:21-26, Anticipates 18:23-25

14 For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you;

Dialog with synagogue, *Didache*, 14:12

15 but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Not give it, not keep it

## THE LORD'S PRAYER IN RECENT RESEARCH

Underlined portions indicate agreement between the two canonical versions of the prayer (Mt., Lk.). Capitalized words indicate additions or changes unique to each gospel. Note that the whole of Luke's version is contained within Matthew's. Structure and content are parallel. It is more likely that Matthew expanded the inherited form than that Luke omitted portions. Texts tend to expand in liturgical usage. This comparison demonstrates that the early Christian communities felt free to adapt the prayer Jesus gave for their own church's needs and style of prayer. The prayer was first given in Aramaic by Jesus to his disciples, translated into Greek after Easter to reach a larger audience, expanded and adapted through use in worship, passed on orally, and finally written down in two of the four gospels. Mark and John do not contain this prayer text, but each has multiple echoes. This is the only prayer we have that Jesus gave his disciples. It was given to be used. A detailed comparison of the two canonical versions leads to the conclusion that "the original form appears to have contained the number of petitions in Luke with the language of Matthew being generally the more original" (Charles Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 127). Note that all of Matthew's expansions (with the exception of the initial OUR) occur at the end of each of the sections. They act as clarification and commentary on the prior text to make its meaning and intent more clear. This prayer is connected to the great themes of Jesus ministry: relationship to the Father, God's holy name, the kingdom, discipleship, bread, forgiveness and protection. The version of the prayer in *Didache* 8:2 is very similar to Matthew's rendering; they may come from the same general locale (i.e. Syria).

	<b>Matthew 6:9-13 (6:1-18)</b> <b>(Jewish Church: longer)</b> <b>(example of brief, sincere prayer)</b>	<b>Luke 11:2-4 (11:1-13)</b> <b>(Gentile Church: shorter)</b> <b>(just learning to pray, model prayer)</b>	<b>Reconstructed Aramaic</b> <b>(Jeremias, Meier)</b>
	"Pray then like this:	"When you pray, say:	
<b>1. Address:</b>	OUR <u>Father</u> , WHO ART IN HEAVEN	<u>Father</u> :	Father:
			<i>Abba</i> (Mk. 14:36, 38; Gal 4:6, Rom. 8:15-16)
<hr/>			
<b>2. Petitions (2 sets: <i>thou</i>- vertical, <i>us</i>- horizontal):</b>			
<b>a. <i>Thou</i>:</b>		<b><i>Thy</i>, 3<sup>rd</sup> sing. verb, all begin with verb, no conjunctions</b>	
1)	<u>Hallowed be thy name</u> ,	<u>Hallowed be thy name</u>	Hallowed be thy name.
2)	<u>Thy kingdom come</u> ,	<u>Thy kingdom come</u> .	Thy kingdom come.
3)	THY WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. (balances with a third <i>thou</i> petition)		
<b>b. <i>We</i>:</b>		<b><i>Us/our</i>, 2<sup>nd</sup> pl. verb, not begin with verb, joined by <i>and</i></b>	
1)	<u>Give us <b>this</b> day</u> <u>our daily bread</u> ; (or <i>our bread for the morrow</i> )	<u>Give us <b>EACH</b> day</u> <u>our daily bread</u> (or <i>our bread for the morrow</i> )	Give us this day our bread for the morrow;
2)	<u>And forgive us</u> <u>our <b>debts</b></u> , As <u>we</u> also have <u>forgiven</u> (past tense.) our <u>debtors</u> .	<u>And forgive us</u> , <u>our <b>SINS</b></u> for <u>we</u> ourselves <u>forgive</u> (pr. tense.) <b>EVERYONE</b> who is <u>indebted</u> to us;	And forgive us our debts, as we forgive (pr. tense.) our debtors;
3)	<u>And lead us not</u> <u>into temptation</u> ,	<u>And lead us not</u> <u>into temptation</u> .	And lead us not into temptation.
	BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL (or, as a substantive adjective, THE EVIL ONE).		
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<b>3. Doxology:</b>	(Some MSS [manuscripts] of Mt. add: not used by Roman Catholics)		
	FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY, FOREVER. AMEN.		This line is omitted in the <i>Didache</i> Jewish doxology after prayer

After the prayer the *Didache* adds, "Three times a day pray thus" (8:3). Jews prayed the *Eighteen Benedictions* morning, noon, evening.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PRAY?

*“Jesus said, ‘Pray then like this, ‘Our Father, who art in the heavens’....”*

### M A T T H E W 6 : 9

Prayer requires a worthy model and a reliable word track.

**T**risha MacFarland stepped off the trail on a family hike in the Appalachians for a bathroom break. She lagged behind, then stepped into the woods. When she emerged...she was on the wrong trail. This is the setting for Stephen King's novel, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*.

“Trisha sat down,” King writes, “closed her eyes and tried to pray for rescue. ...praying was hard.... she discovered herself lost and without vocabulary. She said, ‘Our Father.’ It came out flat and uncomfortable.”

She couldn't remember discussing spiritual matters with her mother, but she asked her father not a month ago if he believed in God.

‘God,’ said Larry MacFarland, ‘now I'll tell you what I believe in. I believe in the *Subaudible*.’

‘The what?’

‘Do you remember when we lived on Fore Street? ...remember how the electric baseboard units would hum? Even when they weren't heating?’

Trisha had shaken her head.

‘That's because you got use to it, but take my word, Trisha, that sound was always there. Even in a house where there aren't baseboard heaters, there are noises. The fridge goes on and off. The traffic goes by. We hear those things all the time, so mostly we don't hear them at all. They become ...’

‘Subaudible,’ she said.

‘Pree-cisely. I don't believe in any thinking God that marks the fall of every bird, a God that records all of our sins in a big golden book and then judges us when we die. But I believe there has to be something. Some sort of *insensate force for the good*.’

‘The Subaudible,’ she said.

‘You got it,’ he replied.

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So here's Trisha, in the woods, lost. There she remembers her hero, the great Red Sox closer Tom *Flash* Gordon. He pulls out miraculous saves for the Bosox, and when he wins, points his finger to the sky giving credit to a personal God who revealed himself to the world in Jesus Christ. Well into a nine-day trial of being bug-bitten, scared, cut, sick from bad water and poisonous berries, Tricia pleads, "Please God, help me find the path," she thought and closed her eyes. And it was to *the God of Tom Gordon* that she prayed, not her father's *Subaudible*. She needed a personal God, one who was really there, one you could point to when and if you got the save. "Please, God, please, help me...."<sup>1</sup>

When life was in danger and hope fading, the *Subaudible* of Tricia's father was not sufficient. Neither is the Star Wars Buddhist Blessing of *The Force Be With You* because it's sub-personal, whereas the God we serve is supra-personal - even Trinitarianly so! You cannot deny you are a person. You have mind, will, emotions, memory, intention, and the capacity to know a God who is not a *blob* or a *hum* or an *it* or an impersonal *force*. *Father* is the word Jesus used, not because God has a male body but because God is holy and transcendent and strong and good and wise and involved. *Father* is inescapably personal.

### **A Brief History**

It's called *The Lord's Prayer* because Jesus gave it.<sup>2</sup> Some call it *The Disciples' Prayer* since they were the ones who received and passed it on with minor variations. It was first spoken in Aramaic, later translated in Greek and Latin, eventually English. It briefly summarizes the ministry of Jesus and his concerns: the Father, the kingdom come down to set things right, the need for bread, healed relationships and protection from powers of evil and destruction beyond our strength, now and at the end of the age. It was adapted for disciples since Jesus had no reason to pray for the forgiveness of his sins; there were none.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edited, Stephen King, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1999) accessed at [PreachingToday.com](http://PreachingToday.com) search under *prayer*.

<sup>2</sup> For recent treatments, see Oscar Cullman, *Prayer In The New Testament*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1995), Chapter 6, "The Our Father," 37-67; N.T. Wright, "The Lord's Prayer as a Paradigm of Christian Prayer," in Richard Longnecker, editor, *Into God's Presence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 132-154; Robert Karris, *Prayer And The New Testament*, chapter 1, "Prayer and the Historical Jesus," (New York: Crossroads, 2000), 1-39; for a treatment with political implications, see the always provocative John Dominic Crossan, *The Greatest Prayer* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2010). He is superb scholar, but his philosophy, theology and politics must be sifted!

<sup>3</sup> Heb. 4:15, "For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect *has been tempted as we are, yet without sin*."

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## Matthew 6:9-15 ..... 6

The Lord's Prayer is a simple word track for learning to pray *Jesus style*, or as we often put it, *in Jesus' name*. It's brief and punchy; it ends on the sobering idea that we need protection from powers that mean us no good. This is a battlefield prayer for those who stand with Jesus against all that is anti-God and anti-human. It is a cry for God to come down and fix things, and to sustain us until that time comes with bread, healing, and spiritual defenses!

Some churches do not use the Lord's Prayer in worship because of a fear it can become rote and meaningless. A greater danger is not to use the prayer that most clearly marks us as Jesus' apprentices. Prayer is soul work, and we should not be discouraged that it takes energy and effort to pray this old prayer with new meaning.<sup>4</sup> I find it helpful to take fifteen or so minutes to pray the prayer slowly, letting the Holy Spirit use each phrase as a magnet to draw me deeper. The same Spirit who inspired Jesus in the composition will stir you as well, as in the following act of self-examination:

"I cannot pray **Our**,  
if my faith has no room for others and their needs.  
I cannot pray **Father**,  
if I do not demonstrate this relationship to God in my daily living.  
I cannot pray **Who art in heaven**,  
if all my interests are (only) earthly things.  
I cannot pray **Hollowed be Thy Name**,  
if I am not striving, with God's help, to be holy.  
I cannot pray **Thy Kingdom come**,  
if I am unwilling to accept God's rule.  
I cannot pray **Thy Will be done**,  
if I am unwilling or resentful of having it in my life.  
I cannot pray **on earth as it is in Heaven**,  
unless I am truly ready to give myself to God's service here.  
I cannot pray **Give us this day our daily bread**,  
without expending honest effort for it, or if I withhold from my neighbor the bread I receive.  
I cannot pray **Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us**, if I continue to harbor a grudge against anyone.  
I cannot pray **Lead us not into temptation**,  
if I deliberately choose to remain in a situation where I am likely to be tempted.  
I cannot pray **Deliver us from evil**,

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<sup>4</sup> For a fresh treatment with an eye to spiritual formation, see James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God: Falling In Love With The God Jesus Knows* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2009), Chapter 3, "God Is Trustworthy," 54-73.

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if I am not prepared to fight evil with my life and prayer.  
I cannot pray **Thine is the Kingdom**,  
if I am unwilling to obey the King.  
I cannot pray **Thine is the Power and the Glory**,  
if I'm seeking power for my glory first.  
I cannot pray **forever**,  
if I am too anxious about each day's affairs.  
I cannot pray **Amen**,  
unless I say, 'Cost what it may, this is my prayer.'"<sup>5</sup>

### The Address

*Our Father, who art in the heavens* is how we begin. This is where prayer starts, with speaking aloud to God as Jesus did and with his blessing. The God whose presence fills the invisible part of creation is open to hear from me!

In a metaphorical sense George Washington is the *father* of our nation.<sup>6</sup> His military labors freed us from the yoke of Britain. Ancient Israel learned to call God Father after being rescued from Egypt through Moses. God was their liberator from bondage; they'd been rescued, reborn and renamed. "God gave us life," they said, "God is *our father*."

But this God, unlike other gods and goddesses in the ancient world, was not a man or woman writ large.<sup>7</sup> There were to be no likenesses of this God because this God is Spirit and not a part of creation. We call this God *Father* because Jesus did. It is an oft-forgotten truth that though God is *father*, God is not male. The biblical God is beyond gender. All the good we associate with the words *father* and *mother* are both found in God, and all the bad some may associate with them is not there. This Father is strong and tender, protective and nurturing, challenging and consoling and just, and is not to be confused with creation. The Father is transcendent. There are only two realities: God, and then everything else God made. God is necessary; all else is contingent, meaning it doesn't have to be.

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<sup>5</sup> Google search under *Lord's Prayer*, listed as anonymous.

<sup>6</sup> Analogy from Karris, *Prayer*, 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> For solid arguments against the naming of Yahweh as *Mother* because of a loss of transcendence and tendency to pantheism with the world viewed as an extension of God's being as God's body, see Elizabeth Achtemeier, "God the Father or God the Mother," *Mission and Ministry*, Vol. 8, Fall 1990, 18-30; also "Why God Is Not Mother," *Christianity Today*, No. 9, Aug. 16, 1993, 16-23.

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At the psychological level the Lord's Prayer is the beginning of a long process of being reparented by God. Every time I utter the word *Father* in prayer the image of my earthly father is there as a filter, most of it good, but some of it distorting and out of focus. Letting God sort the clutter so I see more clearly is part of the work of prayer. Same with my mother. For the first years of my life they were God to me. To honor our parents is to let God work in us to receive the gifts they gave us and let go of the rest in forgiveness and acceptance of our common frail humanity. *Father* is how Jesus taught us to begin our prayer, and if it is understood properly, there's no reason to change it. Now, having addressed God with reverence and trust, Jesus gives us the first three petitions- all vertical!

### **The Three Thou Petitions**

Our hope as Christians is *in God*, and it is to what only God can do that Jesus told directs our prayers. Ask God to stand up for his holy name, to bring the kingdom down to ground level and carry out the divine will. We are instructed to pray for the end of the world as we know it, and to do it from three complimentary perspectives:

- 1) First the dignity of God's person: *Hallowed be thy name;*
- 2) then the inbreaking of God's rule and reign: *Thy kingdom come;*
- 3) then God's effective power: *Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

If I can say this without being misunderstood: Jesus gave us the right of formal complaint. Not whining but formal complaint, of laying before God our pain and asking God to act because he alone has wisdom and power to fix what needs fixing in us and in our *comprehensive* environment. This is the world view hidden in The Lord's Prayer.<sup>8</sup>

Prayer is first about God's possibilities and only secondly about our needs, pressing as they are. Not until we see God as Father, as the One who fills the heavens, as supremely holy, as the coming ruler, and as One with a definite plan for this world's healing are we ready to address our needs. Prayer is not so much about me getting my way with God as it is God's getting his way with me. Prayer is not talking to myself and having an internal conversation between my ideal self and my real self.<sup>9</sup> Prayer is not auto-suggestion; it is not primarily a psychological technique for self-motivation. Prayer is speaking to God the Father

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<sup>8</sup> On the fascinating concept of world view, see David Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Jan Milic Lochman, "The Lord's Prayer in Our Time: Praying and Drumming," in *The Lord's Prayer: Perspectives for Reclaiming Christian Prayer*, edited by Daniel Migliore (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 5, note 2.

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because Jesus the son invites us to, and because we trust him not to lie to us. Prayer takes the risk of seeing things from God's perspective, which- when it happens- is a miracle of the Holy Spirit. If after I pray I see things differently, God has already changed my sight!

He first three petitions are all imperatives, and an imperative- as you know- is a command or order. *You must do this, or do that.* But since we cannot give God's commands, Jesus puts in the passive voice for the sake of appropriate deference, *May this be done, or May that be done.* As a wife might say to her husband, *May the trash be emptied, and May the bills be paid,* hoping her husband will understand the intent rather than having to say more bluntly, *How about emptying the trash and paying the bills, you lazy bum?* The passive voice is less direct; it softens an imperative to a strong wish- even a desperate one. All three of the initial petitions are passive imperatives. Jesus invites us to invite the Father to do what only God can do, which is defend the holiness of his name, bring the kingdom, and enforce the divine will, and to do so immediately. We want God to act now! *Father, will you please be God and do for us what only you can do! Our world's a mess. Your name is defamed, your rule ignored, and everyone is doing their own thing. Show us who you are!*

Lead U-2 singer Bono- in a meeting in Washington in June 2001- said, "I do believe the kingdom of God is taken by force. God doesn't mind if we bang on the door of heaven sometimes, asking him to listen to what we have to say."<sup>10</sup> That's very close to the invitation Jesus gives. We are to pray boldly for our world to be visited.

So be forewarned; every time you take this prayer to your lips you are begging for an immediate divine interruption! A chance to honor God's name, a kingdom assignment, a call to surrender your own will at some point. C.S. Lewis was right: "There are only two kinds of people: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'All right, then, have it your way.'"<sup>11</sup> This is a prayer for those who want God to do business with them now. There is a healthy holy impatience in this prayer.

To speak to this God in prayer is to ask that history as we know it, the common human history of sin and evil and death that began with our first parents, come to an end. *Holy name of God, be hallowed now! Kingdom of God, come now! Will of God, be done now!* You stand on the earth in the middle of the mess and cry for it all to end in a new beginning. And if you don't want that to happen, Jesus asks, "Why not? If all you want is for things to get a little better in your corner of the world, this prayer is not for you. Try something less radical, something more manageable. See a therapist; take the next self-help course you see

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<sup>10</sup> PreachingToday.com search under *Lord's Prayer*.

<sup>11</sup> Idem.

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offered. You need to listen to Dr. Phil, not Dr. Jesus, because Dr. Jesus is making plans for this world to be declared obsolete and replaced. A new world is coming, and we are invited to ask for it now, as we have already been doing for a very long time.

We Americans Christians, with our democracy and prosperity and relative safety, have grown comfortable with the world as it is. We stand atop the heap of history with our feet astride the world in the age of American empire. We are a privileged people, but we are not the hope of this world. This world and all its pomp and fashion will pass away. This world has a rendezvous with the kingdom of God, and it is the job of the church, embedded in every nation and in every culture, to witness to that kingdom and to pray for its arrival. We are to be the contradiction of the world and its obsessions.

### **The Three *Us* Petitions**

Over the years some theologians and preachers have commented on the abrupt shift from the loftiness of the appeal to the *name* and *kingdom* and *will* of the Father down to the earthiness of warm, great-smelling, thick-crust, Mediterranean bread. It's as if we'd reached the mystical heights of prayer, then said to ourselves, "By the way, all this prayer makes me hungry. I think I'd like a pizza, and make it a *supremo*!"

Jesus, it appears, could move from the most lofty to the most practical issues without a pause, from the end of history as we know it to hungry stomachs without there being any breach in the flow of thought. He was- as John Wimber often said- *supernaturally natural*. After all, when he raised Jairus' daughter from the dead, the first thing he said was *Give her something to eat*.<sup>12</sup> Jesus believed that what glorified God was good for people, that what was good for people also glorified God and that the two must be held together.<sup>13</sup> The jump from *Thy will be done* to *give us daily bread* makes sense because it is the Father's will that all have daily food. It's why we have a food pantry every Thursday here at Main Street.

When we cross from the three *thou* petitions to the three *us* petitions, from the bright reality of God to our difficult circumstances, issues change. Heaven is not under assault; we are. Heaven is not the realm of sin, evil, and death; earth is. There's no hunger in heaven, no unforgiveness and bitterness, no more temptation or evil. All the messy, ugly stuff is down here on planet earth. This is where the problems are; this is where divine help is needed. God and the good angels are fine; it's people who are starving and sinning against

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<sup>12</sup> Mark 5:43.

<sup>13</sup> A quote from my professor Charles Talbert in *Reading Luke* (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1982), 34.

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one another and taking the devil's bait and getting dragged around. Robert Browning was wrong: God is in his heaven, and all's *not well* with the earth.<sup>14</sup> So we always pray out of need, out of lack, out of a mess. Jesus invites us to ask for what we need without embarrassment. We are not intruding; God is waiting for us to be honest and gave us a word track to get started. Praise and adoration open this perfect prayer, *hallowed be thy name*, but the second half is pure petition: children asking the Father to meet their needs while they seek to live faithfully on *battleground earth*. The proud and self-sufficient cannot pray this prayer. If you can't ask God for needed things, you can't pray. Asking God for all things good and necessary is blessed by Jesus. Start asking! Let God sort it out.

We are not angels. We are not pure spiritual intelligence as they are but stardust and the breath of God joined as living souls in gendered bodies as male and female. We are not sustained by God directly as angels but indirectly through food and water. Our bellies and our mouths, our gullets and taste buds and teeth and digestive juices and waste all bear the mark of design. God designed us to eat. We don't come with batteries; we come with an alimentary canal. We live not only *on* the earth but *off* the earth with a thin layer of precious top soil beneath our feet and a thinning layer of oxygen above our heads. We are part of the biosphere. The issues of erosion and farm policy and the ozone layer and water quality are implied by this petition for bread since the ingredients for bread must be grown and the seed stock protected. While we hope and pray for the kingdom we must tend the earth and steward our environment. Daily bread is from God and through farmers and bakers.

The second petition is an exercise in corporate humility, "And forgive us our sins, as we forgive everyone who is indebted to us." There's not a single *I* or *me* in the whole of the Lord's Prayer; it's all *us* and *we*. It's a prayer we pray together even when we utter it alone. And what kind of community is this? An honest one, a community of sinners in perpetual need of both receiving and passing on forgiveness and freedom. And this petition is not just for individual sins, but also the ones we commit in groups for which no single person is responsible, "Forgive us our sins...." It's what makes issues like racism so hard to deal with. It is an infection of the whole and not just of an identifiable part that can be isolated and called to repentance. It is only a forgiven and free people who have the moral courage and the ethical vocabulary to face the large sins we commit together.

A little boy was saying his prayers as his grandmother listened. He said, "If I should die before I wake," then paused.

"Go on," his grandmother urged, "finish your prayer." But the little boy scrambled

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<sup>14</sup> The lines from *Pippa's Song* are, "God in his heaven, All's right with the world," *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1919).

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to his feet, hurried downstairs, then in a few moments was back in place, taking up his prayers where he left off.

His grandmother asked him where he'd gone in such a hurry. "I was thinking what I was saying," he insisted. "That's why I had to stop. You see, I'd mixed up my brother's zoo, and stood all his wooden soldiers on their heads, just to see how angry he would get in the morning. But, if I should die before I wake, why, I wouldn't want him to find them that way, so I had to go down and fix them up."

With a quiver in her voice his grandmother said, "I imagine there are a good many prayers that would not be hurt by stopping in the middle to undo a wrong."<sup>15</sup>

If there is a weighty pause in the Lord's Prayer, it's here. Jesus had the nastiest habit of always linking our ability to receive forgiveness from God with our willingness to pass it on to others. Those who hold grudges and nurse inner resentments cannot progress in prayer. They are frozen in the fire of their own resentment and choked by the gall of their own bitter hearts. The willingness to receive mercy from God and pass it on is basic; without it there can be no real community, not in a marriage, not between parent and child, not between the generations and the races, and not in a church.

We need bread to sustain our bodies, and we need a feast of forgiveness to repair our relationships. God is dead serious about the spiritual unity of this church. If we began to forgive today, God would visit us in power. Every act of forgiveness is a fresh opening for the winds of the Spirit to blow. So if you need it, give it! Let people go.

So in the Lord's Prayer we ask for three things for ourselves: *Father, feed us*- our bodies; *Father, forgive us*- our relationships vertical and horizontal; and thirdly, *Father, defend us*- our ongoing battle with temptation and testing, sin and evil. The problem is not just around us or between us but *in us*. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil and the Evil One" is where the prayer ends. The doxology we normally add is not used by the Catholics since it's not in the best manuscripts, but it was added early on because it was common Jewish practices, and - after all- so were all the earliest Christians! It was perhaps too blunt to end the prayer with the Evil One, so a praise song was added!

This petition is misunderstood if read to imply God is the source of temptation. It is rather a prayer we not be overwhelmed or give in- in any ultimate sense- to the forces of darkness that assault us within and without, "O God, protect us from ever selling out. Don't let us meet more than we can stand." The strength to stay true to God and others comes from God, and to take this petition on my lips is to confess we cannot do it alone. This is not a prayer for lonely heroes or casual religious bystanders but for a little huddle of disciples who

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<sup>15</sup> L. Flynn, *Come Alive With Illustrations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 188.

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## **Matthew 6:9-15 ..... 13**

know they will be shredded without the Father's protection. This prayer is not surface or safe. It deals with ultimate issues. It is not self-therapy. It is not a good luck charm. It is not about getting more stuff. It is about surviving in community behind enemy lines and crying for God's intervention in this broken world. This is what we are to pray for. For God to take action, and- in the mean time- give us bread because we are creatures and forgiveness because we are sinners and protection, both from the worst in ourselves and the assault of fallen angels, because we are so terribly vulnerable.

### **Conclusion**

Henry Ward Beecher wrote:

"I used to think the Lord's Prayer was a short prayer; but, as I live longer, and see more of life, I believe there is no such thing as getting through it. If a man, in praying that prayer, were to be stopped by every word until he had thoroughly prayed it, it would take him a lifetime."<sup>16</sup>

How do you see the world? How do you see yourself? As needing only a little improvement, or in need of a major overhaul, one so deep only God can do it? It will make a difference in how you pray this prayer. There is little doubt how Jesus saw it.

Phil Thrailkill  
Main Street UMC  
August 26, 2012

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<sup>16</sup> PreachingToday.com search under *Lord's Prayer*.

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### **STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. Why is a good prayer often a short one? How is this the perfect prayer?
2. What does it mean that creation has two levels that overlap and interlock: 1) heaven as God's home and 2) the earth as ours?
3. Why should we pray, as Jesus' instructed, for our world as we have known it to be quickly ended?
4. If Jesus defines our needs as food and all that makes life humane, as healed and open relationships, and as protection from the worst that is in ourselves and all around us, how do you define them?
5. If Jesus was so direct in asking us to ask God for what we need, we are some hesitant here?
6. What does the addition of the comments in vv.14-15 tell us about which petition is hardest to fulfill?

### **APPLICATION QUESTIONS AND SPIRITUAL EXERCISES**

1. Write a paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer. Use St. Francis' version as a model (16).
2. God is *present, pure, powerful, provides, pardons, protects*. Match each *p* with a line of the prayer.
3. Why is the Lord's Prayer placed after the Great Thanksgiving on communion Sundays?
4. Which petition do you find easiest to pray? Which the hardest? Why?
5. What are you doing about hunger issues, unforgiveness and hatred, resisting evil and oppression?
6. Take time to pray the Lord's Prayer very slowly with long pauses? How is it new?

### **PRAYER FROM THE SUNDAY SERVICE**

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.** Let us pray:

**Almighty and holy God, our heavenly Father,  
you dwell in glory where your rule is unchallenged.  
But we your children, for whom Jesus came as Friend and Savior,  
live in a broken world where your rule is challenged on every front.  
Many do not know you as Father and think of you as a Tyrant.  
Your holy name is misused and attached to all sorts of unworthy plans.  
We build up our own kingdoms and forget yours.  
We stuff ourselves while others have not enough to survive.  
We bear grudges and forget the freedom forgiveness brings.  
We toy with temptations and their deadly pleasures rather than run away.  
Life ties us in knots because we have forgotten to pray and surrender.  
Have mercy upon us, O Lord, for we are in great need.  
Break our bondages and loose our bonds.  
Set us free into the broad place of forgiveness and glad obedience,  
that we may be true and faithful followers of your Son,  
who lived a perfect life, then laid it down in a great sacrifice for us all.  
Amen.** (Silence is kept for confession. Pardon is announced.)

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**Paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer by St. Francis of Assisi**

**OUR FATHER**

most holy, our Creator and Redeemer, our Saviour and our Comforter.

**WHO ART IN HEAVEN**

in the angels and the saints, giving them light to know you,  
since you, Lord, are light; setting them afire to love you,  
since you, Lord, are love; dwelling in them and giving them fullness of joy,  
since you, Lord, are the supreme, eternal good,  
and all good comes from you.

**HALLOWED BE THY NAME,**

may we grow to know you better and better  
and so appreciate the extent of your favors,  
the scope of your promises, the sublimity of your majesty,  
and the profundity of your judgements.

**THY KINGDOM COME,**

so that you may reign in us by your grace,  
and bring us to your kingdom, where we shall see you clearly,  
love you perfectly and, happy in your company, enjoy you forever.

**THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN,**

so that we may love you with all our heart,  
by always having you in mind;  
with all our soul, by always longing for you;  
with all our mind, by determining to seek your glory in everything;  
and with all our strength, of body and soul,  
by lovingly serving you alone.  
May we love our neighbors as ourselves, and encourage them all to love you,  
by bearing our share in the joys and sorrows of others,  
while giving offence to no one.

**GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD,**

your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
so that we may remember and appreciate  
how much He loved us, and everything he said and did and suffered.

**AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES,**

in your immeasurable mercy,  
by virtue of the passion of your Son,  
and through the intercession of Mary, and all your saints.

**AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US,**

and if we do not forgive perfectly,  
Lord, make us forgive perfectly, so that, for love of you,  
we may really forgive our enemies,  
and fervently pray to you for them, returning no one evil for evil,  
but trying to serve you in everyone.

**AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION,**

be it hidden or obvious, sudden or persistent.

**BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL,**

past, present or future, Amen.

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**JOURNAL YOUR THOUGHTS & QUESTIONS  
ON THE LORD'S PRAYER AND THIS SERMON**

[illegible]

**CALL ME AND SHARE YOUR INSIGHTS!**