

February 16

Lesson 12 (NIV)

KINGDOM-SEEKING PRAYER

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 40:1–10, 16, 17

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 6:9–15

MATTHEW 6:9–15

⁹ “This, then, is how you should pray:

“ ‘Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.’ ”

¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

KEY VERSE

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. —Matthew 6:10

HONORING GOD

Unit 3: Jesus Teaches About True Worship

LESSONS 10–13

LESSON OUTLINE

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 - B. Lesson Context
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 - Our Father(s)*
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 - Forgive Every Debtor?*
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HOW TO SAY IT

Colossians *Kuh-losh-unz*.

Corinthians *Ko-rin-thee-unz* (*th* as in *thin*).

Deuteronomy *Due-ter-ahn-uh-me*.

Ephesians *Ee-fee-zhunz*.

Ezekiel *Ee-zeek-ee-ul* or *Ee-zeek-yul*.

Galatians *Guh-lay-shunz*.

Jeremiah *Jair-uh-my-uh*.

Malachi *Mal-uh-kye*.

Thessalonians *Thess-uh-lo-nee-unz* (*th* as in *thin*).

Introduction

A. The Rightful King

Fairy tales and legends often feature stories about a just, good king to come. One famous example is that of Arthur Pendragon. When Arthur’s father, King Uther Pendragon, died, there were many who wanted to be crowned king. There was a test, however: a sword embedded in a stone and engraved, “Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone is the rightwise born king of all England.”

Many tried to pull the sword, but could not. Yet young Arthur, almost by accident, effortlessly pulled the sword from the stone. He was immediately recognized by all the knights and nobles as the new king. Heralds were sent throughout England to proclaim the new sovereign: King Arthur.

Christians also anticipate the coming of a king. The prayer that Jesus taught his disciples gives us insight into what we can expect from the king whose kingdom is breaking into the world. Though many “kings” try to claim our allegiance, this king alone gives us everything we need and is worthy of our deepest loyalty.

B. Lesson Context

Last week’s lesson on Matthew 6:1–8 revealed Jesus’ teaching on the dangers and follies of hypocrisy in the areas of giving and prayer. As with that lesson, the historical setting of today’s lesson text is Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7).

Today’s text studies one of two versions of the Lord’s Prayer, the other being found in Luke 11. Regarding distinctives, the prayer in today’s text differs from its counterpart in Luke 11 in various ways. For one, Jesus’ teaching on prayer that begins in Matthew 6:9 occurred as part of teaching that he was already engaged in. “When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him” (Matthew 5:1). Luke is more specific in noting that the version of the prayer he records happens after “one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples’ ” (Luke 11:1).

Another major difference between Matthew and Luke is in the length of the prayer: Luke’s version is much more concise than Matthew’s. The content is very similar, but Luke has recorded a very minimal prayer. The differences suggest that Jesus taught about prayer more than once. Doing so allowed his disciples to learn through repetition what Jesus wanted them to know.

Just before our lesson’s opening verse, Jesus had criticized hypocritical and pagan prayer, advising privacy and sincerity rather than public performance and verbosity. He followed those negative examples with a positive alternative.

I. The Prayer **(MATTHEW 6:9–13)**

A. Holiness (v. 9)

9a. “This, then, is how you should pray:

The Lord’s Prayer is not simply a masterpiece to be put behind glass in a museum. It is not to be kept unopened and pristine on a bookshelf. Jesus’ prayer is intended to be a model prayer. As such, it teaches *how* his disciples *should pray*. For this reason, the prayer remains a wonderful resource for the church. It can be prayed as recorded in the text, and it can be studied as a pattern that teaches how to be concise and orderly in praying. The prayer consists of four couplets and an ending pronouncement, as follows.

9b. “ ‘Our Father

The first couplet in the Lord’s Prayer consists of the address, seen here, and the first petition, seen in verse 9d, below. While God surely discerns our hearts and intents in prayers, it is important for us to remember the one to whom we are praying.

The way we address God at the outset establishes the tone for the rest of the prayer. Will we address him flippantly and casually, expecting to receive whatever we ask? Will we approach him

in terror, paradoxically afraid both of being heard and of being ignored? Or will we speak to him in a manner befitting the Creator of the universe and lover of our souls (Psalm 63:2, 3)?

Jesus teaches us to address God in two ways. First, he is *our Father*. First-century Jews have many ways to describe God, but this one is used relatively less frequently than others (compare Isaiah 63:16; 64:8). God is more often referred to as Creator, Lord, or King. But the fact that it is entirely appropriate to address God as Father is an understanding that runs throughout the recorded teachings of Jesus. This is so especially in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 4, 6, 8, 18, 26, 32; 7:11).

Note that in the verse at hand, Jesus does not refer to God as Father simply because Jesus is the Son (John 1:14, 18, 49). He does not say *my* Father as he does in John 14:23. He says *our* Father, thereby including his disciples (compare Romans 1:7; Galatians 1:3; etc.). Christians have access to God the Father in prayer on an intimate level, the level of a son or a daughter talking with a loving parent. For some people, this is problematic. None of our fathers were perfect. Some people have no positive memories in that regard. Maybe he was abusive or absent. For this reason, many men (and women) live trying not to become their fathers; they struggle against that bad example for years.

Even so, we should discern carefully an implication of what Jesus teaches. We do not judge God by our earthly fathers.

One of the benefits of having the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) is that we can address God as Father (Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15). Christians have a restored relationship to God as His sons and daughters. He is truly the perfect Father who will never desert us or abuse us. Our Father will never fail us.

The second way Jesus teaches us to address God our Father comes next.

9c. “ ‘in heaven,

To address God as “our Father” is to speak to only part of our relationship to him. The true God is the God *in heaven*. He is not part of the physical universe he created. He is separate from it (transcendent). Although we are created in his image and can have fellowship with him, the God of Heaven is not one of us. His heavenly abode is beyond any physical location that we can understand (compare 2 Corinthians 12:2–4).

This results in an important truth that is implied in Jesus’ words: we are not God. As we begin to understand this, it makes the prayer even more marvelous. We, mere men and women who are not God, are nonetheless privileged to speak with the God of Heaven!

9d. “ ‘hallowed be your name,

Following the address of God in Heaven is the first of the seven petitions, as distributed among four couplets, in this prayer. A petition in prayer is simply a request. Along with praise, thanksgiving, and confession, petitions are an expected, normal, healthy part of a believer’s prayer life. Though God anticipates our needs (Matthew 6:8), he still desires for us to ask him for what we need. Doing so expresses and strengthens our knowledge of our reliance on God for every provision (John 1:3; Acts 17:24–28).

At the most basic level, petitioning for the *name* of the Lord to be *hallowed* is a commitment to honor the third commandment: “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:7). When we pray for God’s name to be hallowed, we pray for his name to be treated as holy. Such a prayer is a commitment to God to do so oneself. We are saying that we intend to reflect his holiness among men and women, using our influence to his glory, not to his shame or to our own ends. We are also asking to be empowered not to misuse his holy name.

In this first couplet of the Lord's Prayer, we run into a great paradox. On the one hand, we are taught to address God as Father. On the other hand, we do this while we acknowledge that God is completely other, completely without sin, completely worthy of honor, completely holy. Intimacy with the Father as his children is to be yoked with our respect for the Holy One. We are encouraged in the Lord's Prayer to be intimate with God as our Father, to share with him the deepest things of our hearts. Yet we are also warned to be respectful of God, not forgetting our position in the hierarchy of the universe. God is great, and we are small. God is holy, and we are sinners saved only through the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 7:27, 28).

B. The Kingdom (v. 10)

10. “ ‘your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

The second couplet features petitions number two and three of the seven petitions of this prayer. Petition number two is for the *kingdom of heaven to come*. When we pray this, we are asking for the establishment of God's reign and sovereign rule. Petition number three asks for God's *will to be done*. When we pray this, we are asking that the will of God be carried out in all things at all times.

These twin petitions cannot be separated. To pray for the establishing of God's kingdom is to pray for the accomplishing of his will. To pray for the accomplishing of his will is to pray for the establishing of his kingdom.

The two petitions are connected by a joint qualifier: *on earth as it is in heaven*. This serves for both petitions. When we pray these petitions, we are praying that God's reign—the kingdom of Heaven—will be established in its ultimate fullness. To pray this is to pray that God's sovereign will, as realized in Heaven, will prevail in our world as well. We are praying that all opposition to God will cease, that all men and women will submit to his will (Revelation 21:22–27). We are praying that the last remnants of rebellion in our universe will be vanquished, and that we will experience his peace (21:1–6).

More than this, our praying for the establishment of God's kingdom and the working of his will on earth commits ourselves to help achieve those results (contrast Revelation 3:1–3). We are to desire God to reign in our hearts and in our world. We are to labor that God's will, his purpose, and his plans will come to fruition here and now. And we do our part of the work in this regard. We should not pray these petitions and then stand back and wait for God to do the work he intends us to do (compare James 1:23–25, 27).

C. Daily Needs (vv. 11–13)

11. “ ‘Give us today our daily bread.

Matthew 6:11 and 12 form the third of the four couplets in this prayer. This couplet features the fourth and fifth of the prayer's seven petitions. The fourth petition, in the verse before us, calls us to go straight to the source for our most basic needs. *Bread* refers to food in general. In this case, it even seems to refer to all the essentials we need to live: food, water, clothing, shelter, etc. When we pray this petition, we recognize our dependence on God. We are affirming our belief that God will supply our every need (compare Luke 12:27–31). God is the ultimate source of our livelihood (Deuteronomy 8:18; James 1:17).

This does not mean we should expect to find manna on our breakfast table when we awake (compare Exodus 16). We commit to working to supply our needs as honest laborers in the world (compare 2 Thessalonians 3:12). But we also trust that God will care for us no matter what reversals and hardships come our way (compare Proverbs 30:8). We may be down to our last dollar and our last can of beans. But we trust that God has not forgotten us and will provide. When our resources are depleted, we may be surprised at how God supplies our daily bread!

But as we pray for bread, we should remember that “man shall not live on bread alone” (Matthew 4:4, lesson 10). We should also think about Jesus, who is the “bread of life” (John 6:48). He came down from Heaven to give us eternal life. Just as our bodies need physical food, our souls need spiritual food.

12. “ ‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.’ ”

The fifth petition of the seven is unique for a couple of reasons. First, it is tied to the concept of daily provision. In this case, the provision sought is that of forgiveness of *our debts*, another term for sin (compare Matthew 18:23–35). This petition, like that for daily bread, invites repetition because of the problem of ongoing sin in our lives. Though the Holy Spirit is renewing us (Titus 3:5), we are not perfectly without sin. We still need to recognize the reality of sin (1 John 1:8–10).

We note that this petition is conditional: as we ask for God’s forgiveness, we promise to be forgiving of others. We do not expect to receive from God what we do not extend to others (compare Luke 6:37). This is the only petition in the prayer that receives an immediate additional comment from Jesus (see on Matthew 6:14, 15, below).

13. “ ‘And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ ”

The fourth and final couplet features the sixth and seventh petitions. These are two sides of the same coin. When we pray *lead us not into temptation*, we are recognizing both lurking sin (Genesis 4:7) and our inability to conquer it on our own. Thus we ask for God’s mercy to help us in the times of trial, in the occasions of temptation. Of course, God does not tempt us (James 1:13), though he does test us (Hebrews 11:17).

When we pray *deliver us from the evil one*, we are again admitting our inability to deal with Satan’s attacks in our own strength (compare 1 Corinthians 10:13). This petition acknowledges not just evil in the abstract but also the evil one himself: the devil, who tempts people to commit sin. Here we see part of the prayer’s assurance. Powerful as he is, Satan is no match for Almighty God (John 17:15; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 2 Timothy 4:18). One who is delivered from evil is to produce the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–25). As we do, we constantly wear “the full armor of God” to “take [our] stand against the devil’s schemes” (Ephesians 6:11).

In translations that use later New Testament manuscripts, this verse ends with a pronouncement: “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.” While this conclusion is beautiful and appropriate, older manuscripts do not include it. But with echoes of 1 Chronicles 29:11–13, it nevertheless expresses a biblical idea based on biblical language. It fits well as a restatement of the themes in the petitions: God’s coming *kingdom*, his *power* to provide, and our glorious deliverance from temptation and evil.

II. On Forgiveness

(MATTHEW 6:14, 15)

A. For Others (v. 14)

14. “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

Having ended the model prayer, Jesus digs deeper to ensure that his listeners understand the implications of the fifth petition (see Matthew 6:12, above). The word translated *sin* here can also be translated “trespass” (example: Romans 5:15–18, 20) or “transgressions” (example: Ephesians 2:1, 5).

Receiving and extending forgiveness are inseparable. To experience the forgiveness of God, our hearts must be prepared to forgive others (Mark 11:25). Forgiveness of sin is essential to the church’s identity, as implied in the words of Jesus at the last supper: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). The church should be a forgiving place, encouraging both the receiving and extending of this act of grace (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).

When we come to the point of realizing how much God has forgiven us, our forgiveness of others will be natural and easier. We forgive as the Scripture requires us to, harboring no anger or grudges against others.

B. For Ourselves (v. 15)

15. “But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Jesus ends with a warning. If you bypass step one of forgiving others, don’t expect step two, the Father’s forgiveness. Don’t miss the point. This is not some sort of bargain we are making with God, as though he must forgive us if we forgive others. It is a request, a plea to God to help us have a spirit of forgiveness. Forgiveness, like love, is hard (compare Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28; Acts 7:59, 60). We need God’s help, and he’s just the one to give it!

Conclusion

A. Proclaiming the Kingdom

Matthew’s text of the model prayer has been prayed by Christians since the earliest days of the church. It’s a simple prayer, with an introduction, seven petitions within four couplets, and a closing pronouncement. Each element teaches about God and how to relate to him in prayer.

Jesus’ teaching shows us how we can assess our prayer lives. We need to acknowledge God as our Father, who loves us and gives us what we need. In that light, we need to be completely honest before him, concerned about his will and power not our own standing with others. Moment by moment we need to rely on him to provide what we need for life and for spiritual wholeness.

When we pray for the coming of the Father’s kingdom, we pray for the coming of a king. When we proclaim the kingdom of Heaven, we proclaim that God *is* king. The Christian message is the good news that God is king, and the king has come to save us.

B. Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, may we be a praying people! As we are, may we respect you in the holiness you deserve. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Our privilege is to approach the king in prayer.¹

¹ Krause, M. S., Sloan, A., Taylor, M. A., & Thatcher, T. (2019–2020). [Kingdom-Seeking Prayer](#). In R. L. Nickelson, J. A. Kenney, M. K. Williams, & J. Gerke (Eds.), *The NIV Standard Lesson Commentary, 2019–2020* (Vol. 26, pp. 209–215). Colorado Springs, CO: Standard Publishing.