

## The Disciples' Prayer

Matthew 6:9-15

Fill in the blank: You really can't have too many \_\_\_\_\_. My wife would probably say that you really can't have too many cookbooks. I'd say that you really can't have too many tools. There are some tools that I use almost every time I'm in the shop: square, ruler, hammer, table saw, etc.. There are other tools that I almost never use. But when there's only one tool that will do the job, I'm always glad I've got one. For example, I recently had to replace the soap dispenser on the sink. It's almost impossible to loosen the nut underneath the sink that holds it tight . . . unless you have one special tool – a basin wrench. I remembered that I'd bought a basin wrench at a garage sale a couple years ago. It took me about 30 minutes to find, but it was the perfect tool for the job. Even though I rarely use it, it's good to have.

Today we are going to study one of the most familiar passages of Scripture in the Bible. It's commonly called "the Lord's Prayer," but some have suggested that we call it the Disciples' Prayer since it's the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray. Whatever you call it, I'd like to suggest that we think of this prayer as a "tool" that we use in our prayer life. For some people the Lord's Prayer will be like an everyday tool. Some people pray this prayer three (or more) times a day every day; it is the most basic tool in their prayer workshop. Others use it only occasionally; but there are times when it is the very prayer that allows them to express to God what needs to be expressed. Different people will use the Lord's Prayer differently.

Personally, there have been times when I've prayed the Lord's Prayer daily. I typically pause after each verse and add my own specific praises or requests. But the Lord's Prayer keeps me focused in prayer. The Lord's Prayer gives me a sense of movement in prayer. When I'm done I know I've prayed through some very significant issues and haven't merely been thinking to myself.

Whether you use the Lord's Prayer to guide your praying every single day or only occasionally, it is a good tool to have. There will be times when you need it. This prayer addresses five broad categories or topics that should be included in our praying. We'll consider them one at a time.

**God's Name (6:9)** What you believe about God – really believe about God – shapes your praying more than anything else. If God were remote and distant, or if God were reluctant to give us gifts, we would pray one way. But since God is near and generous, Jesus tells us:

9 "Pray, then, in this way:  
'Our Father who is in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.

This is the first of several plurals in the Lord's Prayer: **our** Father, **our** daily bread, **our** debts, deliver **us** from temptation. Jesus is teaching us to pray with each other in mind. It's never enough for a follower of Christ to care only about him/herself. And so it's fully appropriate to pray this prayer when we're gathered with other believers. It's also appropriate to pray this prayer privately (as Jesus taught in the previous paragraph) with others in mind. Really the only thing to avoid is "meaningless repetition" – saying "the Lord's Prayer" mindlessly thinking that we'll be "heard for our many words."

As we've seen throughout the SoM, Jesus wants us to relate to God as children to a father. By saying, "**Our** Father" we remember that God has many, many children who pray to Him. By calling God, "Our **Father**" we remember that we're praying to the One who brings unfathomable love and wisdom to the relationship. By calling God "Our Father **who is in heaven**" (lit. "in the heavens") we remember that God's domain is that of the heavens. From a biblical world view, "the heavens" doesn't so much denote the *space* God occupies as the *authority* He has. Heaven is the realm in which God has all authority and power; on earth there are still some rogue elements, but not in heaven. It is a striking thing to be able to address God as "Our Father who is in heaven."

"Hallowed be Your name." We don't hear the word "hallow" very often – mostly around Halloween. The word is normally translated "sanctified" which means set apart or holy. In the Bible, a name isn't simply a title; it signified someone's character, identity, and actions. The name of God signifies everything He is and everything He does. When we pray, "May your name be hallowed/sanctified" we are praying that our Father's name would be respected and revered above all others – in a category all its own. We want people to understand and acknowledge that our Father is worthy of praise and honor.

Praying "hallowed be Your name" is fueled by the conviction and experience that God really is the best. And so it's natural at this point to praise God for specific things that you appreciate about Him.

Next, we pray about **God's Kingdom and Will (6:10)**. When Jesus began His earthly ministry He announced, "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand." In other words, God is invading this world; He is taking over. Eventually, every rival and every enemy will be defeated and He will reign, but it wouldn't be a swift, aggressive take-over. It would be a progressive, subversive take-over. And this take-over would involve Jesus' disciples. Jesus gave His disciples the mission of going to all the families of the earth (groupings of people – Matthew 28:18-20) and inviting them to be part of this kingdom. One of the great things about the Kingdom of the heavens is that **anybody** – literally anybody – who wants to be part of his kingdom can be. You enter this kingdom by faith in Jesus.

In light of the fact that the kingdom *is* coming, Jesus tells us to pray:

10 'Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.

When we pray, "Your kingdom come" we are praying that God would progressively reign in our lives and in our world. When we pray "Your will be done" we are asking that more and more people (and even institutions) would follow God's will as revealed in Scripture. Of course, when the kingdom comes, God's will is done. "On earth as it is in heaven" is a way of saying comprehensively and completely. In heaven God reigns completely; in heaven God's will is the norm, not the exception. We are asking that the same would be true on earth as it is in heaven.

I typically begin thinking about my own life, thinking about ways in which I want God to reign and to do His will more fully (attitude toward others, family, etc.). Then I think about others – family, church, community, world, etc. And our conviction is that when we want what God

wants (His kingdom and His will) and ask Him to act in accordance with what He wants, He responds. We believe that God hears and answers such prayers. .

“Most of the people we meet, inside and outside the church, think prayers are harmless but necessary starting pistols that shoot blanks and get things going.” (Peterson, *Working the Angles*, p. 32) But we know better. We know that God hears and answers prayer.

### ***Our Needs (6:11)***

11 'Give us this day our daily bread.

This is essentially a request for God to supply today's needs today. Listen again to this request: *Give us **this day** our **daily** bread.* What we'd really like is for God to give us this day our yearly bread. We want enough today to last us for a long time. We feel secure when we can see how our needs will be met into the foreseeable future. But Jesus challenged His students to trust God each day for that day's needs. In general Jesus challenged them to live in the present tense. At the end of the chapter Jesus will tell His disciples not to be anxious about what they'd eat, drink, and wear in the future. His concluding line is classic: “Each day has enough trouble of its own” (6:34). We should live today as fully as possible.

And so we should pray for today's needs: *Give us **this day** our **daily** bread.* It's not that we shouldn't pray about future things; we should pray about tomorrow's needs. But we shouldn't miss the fact that God wants us to trust Him to meet today's needs today. The children of Israel didn't have any choice but to trust God for daily bread. He only provided enough manna for one day (two days worth on Friday mornings so they wouldn't have to gather bread on the Sabbath). People in poverty and in crisis situations (such as Haiti) literally have to trust God for daily bread each day.

What does this petition look like if you have a pantry full of food or if you have a meal-pass to Kramer or “the Derby”? One thing to remember is that this is a corporate prayer; these are the things that *we* pray for ourselves. This prompts us to consider the needs of others in the body of Christ. We pray for those in our midst who have lost jobs or who are experiencing difficulties financially. We could even broaden this out to pray for other believers in other parts of the world who live in poverty. We simply ask God to supply.

### ***Our Forgiveness (6:12, 14-15)***

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

Matthew uses the term “debts” – something you owe another person, an obligation. The fact that when Luke records this prayer he used the term “sins” (Luke 11:4) suggests that Jesus is referring to our sin as a debt – something that we owe God. When you break the law (speeding, theft, murder, etc.) you need to “pay your debt to society” either through a fine or jail time or community service. When you sin you break God's law and similarly incur a debt.

Jesus tells His disciples to simply ask God to “forgive us our debts.” We don't try to work out an installment plan whereby we can pay off our debt. We don't try to rationalize away what we've done. We simply ask, “Heavenly Father, would you please forgive this debt – wipe it off

the books. Would you please not make me pay for what I've done?" We're really asking to be let off scot-free. [The *scoet* was a tax levied in medieval England; those who got out of paying this tax got off "scot-free."]

How does asking God to "forgive us our debts" square with the idea that all of our sins are already forgiven when we trust in Christ? There are different understandings of this; I'll give you mine. We understand that our forgiveness was accomplished on the cross. When Jesus hung on the cross, our sins/debts were laid upon Him. He paid for our sin once and for all. You ***experience*** that forgiveness when you admit that you've sinned and believe that Jesus' death paid for your sin. When you trust in Jesus in this way, God forgives your sin and gives you life. In an absolute sense, your sins are forgiven – past, present, and future.

My understanding is that Jesus is emphasizing the relational aspect of forgiveness when He tells us to ask God to forgive us our sins. Even though our sin is forgiven in an absolute sense, when you sin it affects your fellowship with God. OT writings such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Malachi make clear that God takes our sin personally; He feels like a wife whose husband won't quit cheating on him and like a father whose children don't appreciate his generosity. Paul said that it is possible to grieve the Holy Spirit. When we sin we personally offend God and need to acknowledge as much and ask for forgiveness (this is my understanding of 1 John 1:9 also).

I would encourage all of us to have a time daily when we take inventory of our lives and ask the question, "Are there ways in which I have offended God today – either by the things I have done or by the things I've left undone?" As in all healthy relationships, it's not good to ignore offenses until they fade from our minds; it's best to acknowledge them directly.

Let's read verse 12 again:

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

It is unthinkable to Jesus that we would ask not to make us pay for what we've done and then turn around and demand that others pay for the things they've done to us. Jesus even returns to this point in verses 14 and 15 (after He has finished telling His disciples how to pray):

14 "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

People often get bogged down in the logic of these verses and miss the clear ethical demands of what Jesus is saying. We have a hard time believing that Jesus really means what it sounds like He's saying here: that God won't forgive us if we won't forgive others. But actually, I think that's exactly what Jesus is saying – not in an absolute sense, but in a limited, qualified sense. (See also 7:1-5) When we refuse to forgive others, it hinders our fellowship with God. It is flagrant hypocrisy for us to say to others, "I'm going to make you pay for what you've done for me," and then ask God, "Please don't make me pay for my sin." This is serious business. And I don't know any way to soften what Jesus is saying here. Jesus' teaching forces us to deal with unforgiveness toward others. It's not easy, but it's necessary.

***Our Temptations (6:13)***

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.'

Only those who know that they are weak and vulnerable will pray this. If you think you're strong and invincible you will never pray this way. You will naively walk through life bombarded by all sorts of temptations that could have been and should have been avoided in the first place. But Jesus advocates that we preemptively pray about "temptation." The term temptation is used both for common trials of life and for temptations in the sense of things that entice us to sin. Given our inherent weakness, it's advisable to ask God to spare us from trials and temptations as much as possible because both can lead to sin. We will have some trials and some temptations, but if we've prayed preemptively we can face them with the assurance that God has some purpose for them in our lives. This attitude toward temptation/trials isn't escapism or a desire for an easy life; it is simply an honest acknowledgment of our weakness.

"Do not lead us into temptation" is an interesting figure of speech (*litotes*) in which something is expressed by "negating the contrary." In other words, by saying "***do not lead us into*** temptation" we are saying, "***Do lead us away from*** temptation and into righteousness" (see Carson, *The SoM*, p. 70). The last part of the petition expresses this very idea: "*but deliver us from evil*" - or better "deliver us from the evil one" (i.e., Satan – the one who tries to entice us with temptations). Again, such a petition is prompted by a sense of vulnerability and weakness. Only those who understand that we have an enemy who "prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour" will pray this.

You can't always anticipate the trials or temptations that you'll experience any given day, and so it's good to pray generally, "Do not lead us into temptation," trusting that you will avoid certain temptations/trials that day. But sometimes you have a pretty good sense of the temptations you might face that day; when you do, you can pray specifically that God would spare you temptations in those areas.

Notice how the Disciples' Prayer ends in verse 13:

13 . . . For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.'

This last phrase isn't found in the earliest manuscripts. Nevertheless these things are taught about God in other places and underscore that what we believe about God affects our praying more than anything else.

I hope you catch a glimpse of how the Lord's Prayer can give focus, movement, and depth to our praying. And so I commend the Lord's Prayer to all of us as a tool – a very valuable tool when it comes to our praying. As I mentioned at the beginning, this prayer will be an everyday tool for some of us. It will become a very foundational part of our prayer life. The more we use this prayer to guide our praying, the deeper our understanding and the more precious it becomes. Others of us might use the Lord's Prayer only occasionally. But when we do, it can give structure and movement to our praying. Let's now ask God to lead us in our habits of prayer.