



THE LORD'S PRAYER

A Verse-by-Verse Devotional Journey

VINCE WILCOX

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PRAYER

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Devotional Journey*

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To Sharon, Lauren, and Alli:

I love you more than more.

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible isn't a textbook or an encyclopedia. Rather, it's a library of 66 books filled with stories, songs, biographies, genealogies, proverbs, parables, history, letters, prayers and prophecies all chronicling God's revelation of himself to humanity.

Though the Bible was written by more than 40 authors on three continents over a period of about 1500 years, it tells one big, messy, captivating, convoluted, illuminating, breathtaking, and ultimately redemptive story.

As we make our way through these God-inspired writings, there are certain books that stand out. And within these books, there are certain passages that are particularly revealing. And within those passages, there are specific verses that seem to summarize the whole story.

The Lord's Prayer is one of the Bible's defining moments.

It's literally and figuratively the centerpiece of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ's revolutionary statement of how God intends for us to relate to him and to one another. In a sense, the Lord's Prayer is a summary of his whole sermon. But instead of phrasing

them as “bullet point” commands, Jesus sets these principles into an active conversation we are to have with our Father.

If you want to know what it really means to follow Jesus, I would encourage you to start with the Lord’s Prayer. If you want to deepen your fellowship with God, I invite you to pitch your tent on these verses.

You’ll find this prayer to be elegantly simple yet magnificently profound:

- As we meditate on it, we understand better who God is and who we are. It is therefore *theological*.
- As we obey it, we discover the Lord’s direction for our real-life circumstances. It is therefore *practical*.
- As we believe it, we abandon ourselves to the life of faith that comes by trusting in Christ alone. It is therefore *soteriological*; that is, dealing with our salvation.
- As we pray it, we are recreated in Christ’s image as his Spirit sanctifies our hearts. It is therefore *transformational*.
- As we embody it, we become agents of God’s mercy in a world that is desperate to know the love of the Father. It is therefore *missional*.
- As we hope in it, we anticipate the inevitable renewal of the new heaven and new earth. It is therefore *eschatological*.

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- As we experience it, we are overwhelmed by God's mercy and grace and respond in worship and praise. It is, from beginning to end, *doxological*.

All this in just five simple verses.

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CHAPTER 1

FIVE SIMPLE VERSES

The New Testament text that we know as the Lord's Prayer (or the Model Prayer) is recorded in two places in the Gospels. In Luke 11, Jesus' disciples come to him after he has finished praying. They ask him to instruct them to pray as John the Baptist taught his followers. Luke records what we know as the Lord's Prayer, followed by a teaching about persevering in prayer before a gracious Father. In comparison, Matthew records a slightly longer version of this prayer in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Here, the Prayer is bookended by Jesus' revolutionary teaching about what living by grace really looks like.

These two accounts are distinct but not contradictory. Luke tells the story of Jesus responding to the disciples' private inquiry while Matthew recounts Jesus' public teaching to a large crowd gathered on a mountainside. If anything, the fact that these accounts are almost identical supports the reliability of its witnesses and the veracity of the texts.

Here is Jesus' prayer as recorded in Matthew 6:

- 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.”*

Older translations such as the King James Version include an additional phrase at the end of verse 13: *“For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”* Though traditional recitations of the Prayer end with these familiar words, most modern translations note that the earliest manuscripts omit this phrase and that it was probably added later. Nonetheless, this phrase is a fitting, biblical finale to the Prayer, paraphrasing 1 Chronicles 29:11 where David proclaims,

Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.

Now that we’ve had a brief introduction to the Prayer, let’s consider why prayer was so indispensable to Jesus’ disciples—both then and now.

CHAPTER 2

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS
OF PRAYER

v. 9 “This, then, is how you should pray...”

Day in and day out, Jesus' disciples saw him steal away to spend time with his Father. They understood that his supernatural power and peace came from prayer. They not only wanted to have what Jesus had, they wanted to become what Jesus was. To walk in his footsteps meant they would have to join him on their knees.

Throughout Scripture, we see prayer as having several distinct but interrelated dimensions: praise, pardon, and petition.

Praise

Prayer often begins with praise--acknowledging who God is and responding in worship. The more we meditate on his character and compassion, the more we will want to glorify him for who he is. The book of Psalms overflows with praise and adoration:

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*Give praise to the LORD, proclaim his name;
make known among the nations what he has done.
Sing to him, sing praise to him;
tell of all his wonderful acts.
Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.
Look to the LORD and his strength;
seek his face always. (Psalm 105:1-4)*

But focusing on God's sinless character will have an uncomfortable consequence: we will become profoundly (and perhaps painfully) aware of our own sinfulness. Like Isaiah in the presence of the Lord, we will cry out, "*Woe to me...I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty*" (Isaiah 6:5).

Pardon

The good news is that Christ has dealt once and for all with our transgressions (Hebrews 7:27). Scripture says that we may now "*...approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16). Nonetheless, the apostle Paul instructs believers to carefully examine themselves to make sure they are right before God (1 Corinthians 11:28). Like David, we ask the Lord to sanctify our hearts: "*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*" (Psalm 139:23-24).

We therefore respond to God's Spirit with contrition and confession. As the apostle John writes,

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

As believers in Christ, we receive the pardon that he provides us through his blood. We thank God for his mercy and forgiveness. We celebrate the unmerited favor and freedom we experience in Christ.

Petition

Having given God the glory he is due and aligned our hearts with his, we're ready to bring our petitions before him. To ask God for something without first esteeming him and examining our motives is like the immature child who is more interested in what his parent can give him than in his relationship with his parent.

In Matthew 6:32-33, Jesus says that his Father knows what we need before we ask, but that he requires us to seek his Kingdom and character in order to receive it.

Prayer is therefore not telling God what's on our minds and persuading him to change his. Rather, effectual prayer happens when God tells us what's on his heart so that we might actually have *“the mind of Christ”* (1 Corinthians 2:16). Prayer is therefore not a "to-do" list for God as much as a "to-be" list for us. When our hearts and minds are aligned with the Father, then Jesus makes an incomprehensibly audacious promise. He *will* answer our prayers:

- *Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And*

I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (John 14:12-14)

- *In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. (John 16:23-24)*

The most challenging thing about prayer is the spiritual discipline of living in congruence with the will of God. We are so accustomed to walking “in the flesh” (Galatians 5:17) that even our prayers can be self-serving. But when we “*walk by the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:16), we can’t help but pray prayers that the Lord has already determined to answer.

John, the same apostle who recorded Jesus’ teaching on prayer, understood the deep connection between living in God’s will and having our prayers answered:

- *Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. (1 John 3:21-22)*
- *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. (1 John 5:14-15)*

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Praise, pardon, and petition are three essential elements of prayer that we will encounter in our journey through the Lord's Prayer.

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CHAPTER 3

THE CENTRALITY OF
COMMUNITY

v. 9 “Our...”

Jesus could have instructed his disciples to pray “My Father in heaven.” But he didn’t.

This is because our relationship with the Father, while personal, isn’t private. We know this because the Ten Commandments—which summarize the rules for godly living—contain four “vertical” commands about our relationship with God followed by six “horizontal” commands about our relationship with one another. Our devotion to God is inextricably intertwined with our commitment to those around us. That is why the apostle John will later write:

We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. (1 John 4:19-20)

When Jesus is asked by some teachers of the Law to

weigh in on their debate about which is the greatest commandment, he offers a dual response:

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”
(Mark 12:29-31)

Jesus instructs us to begin the Prayer by recognizing that we live out our faith in the context of our community. There is no “us” and “them.” Rather, we begin by confessing that we are all estranged from our Father by our rebellion (Romans 3:23) and all can be redeemed through the salvation the Father offers through his Son:

For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. (2 Corinthians 5:14-16)

We pray “our Father” because we’re all castaways in the same lifeboat.

We don’t gloat because we’ve been rescued. Rather, we’re called to extend that same saving grace to others.

Even our enemies.

Especially our enemies.

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As such, it's unconscionable for us to esteem ourselves at the expense of others. In God's economy, humility trumps ability, serving others trumps being served, and exalting others trumps exalting ourselves.

And we shouldn't think that this "our" refers only to our specific community of faith. Rather, we use the inclusive "our" when we pray to help us remember that we are created, loved, and pursued by a heavenly Father "*who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth*" (2 Timothy 2:4).

In the verses immediately before and after the Model Prayer, Jesus warns his followers to avoid self-serving displays of public prayer, charity, and fasting. This is in stark contrast to Jesus' religious opponents, the Pharisees, who make big productions about their public piety while living spiritually empty lives:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14)

When we are more interested in a public audience

than a divine one, we forfeit our heavenly Father's attention. In Matthew 6, Jesus says that when prayers, offerings, and fasting are offered in secret, then "*...your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you*" (6:4, 6:6, 6:18).

This is not to say that every expression of faith will be covert. Rather, our expressions should focus first on God and others rather than on ourselves. So the Model Prayer begins by affirming our collective humanity under God's divine Fatherhood.

We pray individually; yet we pray collectively.

We confess God's fatherhood as well as our mutual siblinghood.

We recognize our common need and God's uncommon provision.

There are no special favorites, for we are all favored by his grace.

We're all in this together.

CHAPTER 4

THE AUDACITY OF “ABBA”

v. 9 “Our Father...”

Jesus radically changed the way people prayed to God, his Father.

Though there are many Old Testament verses that testify to the Lord's tender, paternal care, the Jewish religious authorities were outraged when Jesus referred to God as *Abba*, an intimate and personal term for “Father.” Scholars believe the word *Abba* is derived from the babbling sounds a baby makes, implying the profound intimacy an infant has with its father. Although *Abba* doesn't translate directly as “Daddy,” it was nevertheless audacious for Jesus to refer to God with such familiarity:

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5:16-19)

Make no mistake, Jesus is merely addressing his Father the way he has addressed him from before the creation of the universe. Jesus is not a mortal who recognizes that God is his creator. Rather, he is God's immortal Son, co-existent and co-equal with his Father, the One through whom the world and everything in it was created (John 1:1-3). So it's appropriate for Christ to address his Father the way a young child lovingly addresses his dad.

The real audacity, however, is that Jesus makes it possible *for us* to approach God in the same way he does. For Jesus not only came to pay our debt in full, he also came to fully restore us to God's family. As the apostle Paul writes:

The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:15-17)

When Jesus instructs us to pray, "*Our Father in heaven,*" he's inviting us to experience the same kind of access to God that he has. He can extend this invitation because *Christ himself is that access.* Jesus makes this audacious claim about himself:

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well.

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From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”
(John 14:6-7)

If Jesus wasn't who he claimed to be, then the Jewish authorities had every right to condemn him as a blasphemer. But time and again, Christ demonstrated his power over both natural and spiritual forces, his authoritative understanding of biblical truth, and his profound compassion for humanity. Over three years of public ministry, culminating in his death and resurrection, Jesus established beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was the messianic Son of Man prophesied by Scripture as well as the pre-existent Son of God sent to save humanity from our sins.

Even those who put him to death were persuaded he was no mortal man:

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54)

Jesus was and is God's Son. He alone has the right to address his Father as Abba. And Christ conveys this privilege to us because, by his death and resurrection, he has secured our adoption.

If we have received Jesus' atoning work on our behalf, then the most important aspect of our identity and self-worth isn't our job title or educational stature or financial status. It isn't where we live or what we drive or whose ring we wear. We're no longer defined by our failures or successes nor by our accolades or addictions.

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Rather, when we begin to accept our eternal adoption and unconditional acceptance in Christ, we can't help but exclaim with ecstatic incredulity:

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3: 1)

CHAPTER 5

THE HOLY KING OF HEAVEN

v. 9 “...Our Father in heaven...”

Jesus addresses God with tender familiarity but also with profound reverence. For the Lord is not just “Our Father,” he is also “Our Father *in heaven*.”

The only things we can reliably know about heaven—and there are many such things—are those God has chosen to reveal to us through his Word. In particular, we read that:

- Heaven is the eternal realm where God’s majesty and mystery flow unrestrained from his person, where living creatures constantly praise him, saying “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come*” (Revelation 4:8).
- God’s faithful children go immediately to heaven when their lives on earth are complete (Luke 16:22, 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8).
- Heaven will ultimately be recreated and reunited

with earth (the “*new heaven and new earth*”) where God will be personally and physically present with his people for eternity (Revelation 21:1-5).

God created Adam and Eve to know him and one another in a physical place, forever. In the beginning, the physical and spiritual realms were unified. But humanity’s sin fractured this integration. Things are no longer on earth as they are in heaven. We not only lost the privilege of Paradise, but we also lost our capacity for intimate communion with God and one another.

Because of sin; insolence, ignorance, and indifference replaced a healthy reverence for our heavenly Father. If we were to actually experience the unapproachable light of God’s holiness (1 Timothy 5:16), we would be mortified by our utter ungodliness. Scripture reveals that even God’s servants were overwhelmed by his presence:

- Isaiah was totally undone by his vision of God in the temple (Isaiah 6:5).
- The disciples “*fell facedown to the ground, terrified,*” when they heard God’s voice at Christ’s transfiguration (Matthew 17:6).
- The apostle John fell at the feet of the Lord “*as though dead*” in his vision (Revelation 1:17).

Without divine intervention, heaven would be a place of abject and unrelenting terror. But for his mercy, we would be consumed.

But God gives us more than mercy; he gives us

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grace.

While mercy is not getting what we rightly deserve, grace means receiving that to which we are not entitled. In Christ, God transforms enemies into family: *“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household...”* (Ephesians 2:19).

Though we may be residents of earth, believers are also bona fide citizens of heaven who are able to *“...approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”* (Hebrews 4:16).

The writer continues, *“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire’”* (Hebrews 12:28-29).

Notice the connection between acceptance in the Son and reverence for the Father. Without Christ, we could never approach the King of heaven. In Christ, however, we are beloved by a heavenly Father whose Son has returned to heaven, saying, *“...I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am”* (John 14:3).

Heaven is a present reality and a future promise.

So, at the outset of his Prayer, Jesus reminds us that our Father is the High King of Heaven. As the apostle Paul will write: *“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name”* (Ephesians 3:14-15).

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CHAPTER 6

HALLOWING WHAT IS HOLY

v. 9 "...hallowed be your name,"

In the Ten Commandments, the Lord warns his people to regard him with careful reverence, not abusing or blaspheming his name (Exodus 20:7). The Jews took this so seriously that they wouldn't say God's name aloud in order to guard against any possible misuse.

In Eastern culture, your name wasn't just *what you were called*; your name was *who you were*. Your name embodied your character, your lineage, and your authority. When God gave Adam the responsibility of naming all the animals and birds he had created (Genesis 2:19-20), he was actually giving Adam dominion over their existence. Names had great power and significance.

The Old Testament names for God convey, among other things, his sovereign authority (*Yahweh*), his might (*El Shaddai*), his mastery (*Adonai*), his provision (*Jehovah-Jireh*), his peace (*Jehovah Shalom*), and his healing (*Jehovah Rapha*). These names communicate God's utter otherness, his consuming glory, and his divine power.

At the outset of his Prayer, Jesus instructs us to

“hallow” God’s name. Although hallow isn’t a household word, most modern translations utilize this Old English term because it conveys the idea of “holding holy” or venerating that which is sacred.

To hallow God’s name means to sanctify it (i.e. “set it apart”) as sacred precisely because it is sacred. To do otherwise is to profane it, an act of blasphemy. But when we truly hallow God’s name, we give him the honor and praise he is due. Rather than blaspheme, we worship.

It’s noteworthy that eight of the Ten Commandments are written as prohibitions (i.e. “*Thou shalt not...*”). Just as valuing life and being a faithful spouse are the affirmative opposites of murder and committing adultery, to hallow God’s name is the affirmative opposite of taking his name in vain.

Jesus commands us to worship the name of his Father. In doing so, we recognize God’s divine character and profound compassion. When we praise his name, we are praising him.

Throughout the book of Psalms, the name of the Lord is hallowed almost 100 times, including:

- *LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!* (Psalm 8:1)
- *I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.* (Psalm 9:2)
- *Therefore I will praise you, Lord, among the nations; I will sing the praises of your name.* (Psalm 18:49)
- *May we shout for joy over your victory and lift up our banners in the name of our God.* (Psalm 20:5)
- *Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.* (Psalm 20:7)

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- *I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you. (Psalm 22:22)*
- *Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together. (Psalm 34:3)*
- *In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever. (Psalm 44:8)*
- *And I will hope in your name, for your name is good. (Psalm 52:9)*
- *I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. (Psalm 63:4)*
- *Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious. (Psalm 66:2)*
- *I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. (Psalm 69:30)*
- *Help us, God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake. (Psalm 79:9)*
- *Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD—that you alone are the Most High over all the earth. (Psalm 83:18)*
- *I will praise you, LORD my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever. (Psalm 86:12)*
- *Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. (Psalm 96:2)*
- *Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. (Psalm 100:4)*
- *Let the name of the LORD be praised, both now and forevermore. (Psalm 113:2)*
- *From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised. (Psalm 113:3)*
- *Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness. (Psalm*

115:1)

- *Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. (Psalm 124:8)*
- *Your name, LORD, endures forever, your renown, LORD, through all generations. (Psalm 135:13)*
- *My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever. (Psalm 145:21)*
- *Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with timbrel and harp. (Psalm 149:3)*

Throughout the Old Testament, God reveals himself to his people as they hallow his name. These scriptures also point toward God's ultimate revelation of himself through his Son, Jesus (John 14:7-9). Indeed, the apostle Paul writes that although Jesus was in very nature God, because of Christ's humble condescension on our behalf:

...God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-10)

The Father has now ordained that his Son's name be treated with the same awe and reverence with which the Son instructs us to hallow his Father's name. As such, it would be fitting for us to substitute "the name of Jesus" in any of the aforementioned Psalms; for when we are hallowing the name of the Son, we are doing so to the glory of the Father.

CHAPTER 7

ANTICIPATING GOD'S KINGDOM

v. 10 “Your kingdom come,”

Jesus clearly understands his Father to be the Creator King of heaven and earth. His kingdom comes *in us* as we individually and collectively submit ourselves to his lordship. But this transformation isn't just personal or communal, it's eschatological. History will culminate in the subjugation of all the nations of the earth under God's authority. For the world in which we are living is not the world we were created to enjoy. We are living in a fallen kingdom.

In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve in his own image and gave them dominion over this world and everything in it (Genesis 1:27-29). By sinning, Adam and Eve forfeited their authority to a fallen angel, Lucifer, who became “...*the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient*” (Ephesians 2:2). Christ, our new Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22, Hebrews 4:15), is tempted by this same devil at the onset of his ministry. Satan offers to give Jesus “*all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor... if you will bow down and worship me*” (Matthew 4:8-9).

Notice the “kingdom” terminology: Christ is unwilling to become one of Lucifer’s subjects—even if it means he could rule the world under his authority.

No. Jesus knows who he is and what he must do.

Through his death and resurrection, Jesus will redeem the world and all who are in it. The empty tomb will open the way for his Father’s kingdom to come—forever ending the devil’s reign, destroying the power of sin and death, and vanquishing Satan and those who conspire with him.

This is the coming kingdom to which Christ refers in the Prayer.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus uses two terms, the “*kingdom of God*” and the “*kingdom of heaven*,” to describe the present and future dominion of his Father. This emerging kingdom, which Christ says is now “*at hand*,” stands in stark contrast to the kingdom of this world. Satan’s kingdom is filled with injustice, oppression, suffering, disease, hate, ignorance, and death. In contrast, God’s kingdom is filled with justice, freedom, deliverance, healing, compassion, wisdom, and life.

Some scholars believe that the terms “*kingdom of God*” and “*kingdom of heaven*” are interchangeable, while others assert that there are specific reasons that Christ and the apostles chose to use one term over the other. Whatever your theological viewpoint, all believers would agree that God is the King of heaven and earth, and that his plan is to redeem his people and restore his creation. We would also agree that--while God is sovereign over all of his creation--we confidently await the day when all will be on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

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Jesus tells us that though this kingdom has modest beginnings, it will ultimately infiltrate and dominate all things:

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches." He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough." (Matthew 13:31-33)

Christ says that God's kingdom will invariably transform the communities in which its citizens find themselves. Its stewards become agents of change: the "yeast" which raises the bread and the "salt" which preserves and flavors the food (Matthew 5:13). As such, true citizens of God's kingdom will be remarkable for their humility, self-sacrifice, and love in action.

While there is a natural and inevitable progression to the kingdom's emergence, there is also a sudden and cataclysmic aspect to "*the day of the Lord*."

We are living in the "now and not yet" time between Christ's redemption on the cross and God's restoration of all things. In this season, the gospel of the kingdom is being proclaimed so that the world might repent before Christ returns with sudden finality (2 Peter 3:9-10): "*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come*" (Matthew 24:14).

The kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world should not be seen as equal and opposite anymore than Satan is God's equal opposite. Rather, the kingdom of God is eternal and perfect while the kingdom of this world is temporal and broken. The Lord promises the ultimate redemption and re-creation of our fallen world:

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever."
(Revelation 11:15)

John then describes the ultimate reunification of these kingdoms:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."
(Revelation 21:1-3)

We are reminded of this extraordinary promise every time we pray "*your kingdom come.*"

The Early Church, overwhelmed by trial and persecution, prayed fervently for Christ's swift return. They greeted one another with the Aramaic phrase,

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“*Maranatha!*” which means, “The Lord is coming!” (a proclamation) as well as “Come, O Lord!” (a prayer).

The last chapter of the last book of the Bible ends with these words: “*He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus*” (Revelation 22:20).

No matter our circumstances, the certainty of his coming kingdom can fill us with hope, anticipation, and peace. As we wrestle in prayer about our past disappointments and present predicaments, praying “*your kingdom come*” reminds us we can have full confidence in his future for us. In a sense, this single petition contains the answers to all of our prayers.

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CHAPTER 8

KNOWING AND DOING
GOD'S WILL

v. 10 “...your will be done,”

Jesus instructs us to pray for the ultimate manifestation of his Father's kingdom: a world where God's will is fully honored and obeyed. So what is the relationship between doing God's will and being a citizen of his kingdom?

Contrary to what we may have been told, our status as God's children is not determined by our behavior. We can't earn God's acceptance simply by doing his will. If we could, there would be have been no need for Christ to die on the cross. Rather, God accomplished our adoption into his family by sending his Son to pay the penalty for our unrighteousness. Most religions, including some factions of Christianity, teach that we only belong to God if we believe and behave. In contrast, the Bible tells of a Father who sent his Son to die for us “*while we were yet sinners*” (John 3:16-17, Romans 5:8). God's forgiveness not only *precedes* our repentance and obedience, it actually *facilitates* it (Romans 2:4).

The only biblical condition for salvation is to receive Christ's redemptive work by faith (Acts 4:12, Acts 16:30-31, Ephesians 2:8-9).

We accept his acceptance.

We receive the free gift of God, given *because of* and *in spite of* our disobedience: "*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*" (1 John 4:10).

Christ does not impose a "works" standard we have to meet to be saved. Rather, a vibrant faith produces healthy fruit. Jesus says, "*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing*" (John 15:5). This is why Paul calls the new spiritual traits in transformed believers "*the fruit of the Spirit*" (Galatians 5:22-23).

As we understand what it means to belong to God, our new beliefs will produce corresponding behaviors that please our heavenly Father (James 2:20-24). Although our fleshly nature initially rebels against his authority in our lives, we gradually recognize that no one in the entire universe cares more about our welfare than God. The Lord, having purchased our pardon (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), is equally committed to transforming us from defiant adolescents into mature sons and daughters. This process is called "sanctification."

The apostle Paul writes about the tension between our old lives and our new ones:

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making

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me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:21-25)

The crucifixion delivers us from sin's bondage, beginning with our spirit and in due course freeing our minds and bodies. The apostle Paul rightly uses the imagery of war, imprisonment, and rescue to describe the internal spiritual conflict that will ultimately result in our being able to pray "your will be done." In a different passage, the apostle John talks about our growing desire to obey God:

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 John 5:1-5)

So how can we know and do God's will?

The answer is through two supernatural resources: God's Holy Word and God's Holy Spirit. God's Word directs us to the saving work of Jesus. Once we've surrendered our lives to him, Christ promises to empower us to do God's will through his Holy Spirit.

Not only can we know his will; but we can also experience his will-power.

Here's how: The Bible is unlike any other book ever written. Though its 66 books have many writers, Christians believe it has but one Author:

All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The Holy Spirit revealed God's truth to its writers and continues to reveal God's will to its readers. The Bible is a living book:

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

If we want to know God's will, then we must read, study, memorize, meditate on, and obey his Word. It's almost impossible to open a page of Scripture and not discover the Lord's plan and purpose for our lives. But the challenge isn't just how to find God's will, but also how to obey it. For throughout the Bible, we find men and women who knew God's commands but couldn't keep them.

At the cross, Christ dealt a deathblow to the power of sin in our lives. As he prepared to return to heaven, he instructed his disciples to return to Jerusalem and pray for the imminent coming of the Holy Spirit. He promised that this third person of the Trinity would

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supernaturally empower them to be his witnesses throughout the whole world (John 15:26, Acts 1:8):

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you. (John 16:13-15)

This passage tells us that the Holy Spirit will reveal God's truth, prepare us for what's coming, help us glorify Christ, and be the conduit of Jesus' blessings from the Father. We desperately need the Holy Spirit to know and obey God's will.

Are you experiencing the person and power of the Holy Spirit in your life? You can, first by receiving Christ and then by asking him to empower you to follow him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. The Holy Spirit is the answer to this prayer.

Following God's will doesn't mean trying to perfectly obey an impossible set of rules. Rather, it means receiving Jesus' perfection on our behalf and then allowing his Holy Spirit to perfect Christ's character in us. As the apostle Paul writes, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

As we surrender our broken wills to him, he not only gives us the power *to pray*, "your will be done," but also the power *to do* his will.

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CHAPTER 9

LIVING HERE AS WE WILL THERE

v. 10 “... on earth as it is in heaven.”

In verse 9, Jesus commands us to hallow his Father's name. In verse 10, he calls us to live in the light of his coming kingdom, specifically, by learning to live here as we will live there.

There is no human in heaven against his or her will. Everyone there has chosen to live in joyful, reverent obedience to its King. This unconditional surrender is an act of the will, made possible by grace through faith in Christ.

In contrast, for the time being, earth is still the battleground for the wills of men and women. So by definition, every heart in heaven has conformed to God's will. And why would they choose otherwise? For in God's presence, they are overwhelmed by his glory and omnipotence. His light and love illuminate everything. The apostle John was given this vision of the New Jerusalem:

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of

God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:22-27)

Instead of acting out of fear of punishment, heaven's citizens are motivated by their love and reverence for God. In heaven, it would be nonsense to think, "I hope God's not looking" or "What's the least I can do to get by?" Rather, our hearts will overflow with gratitude and respect. Because we'll be living in the presence of infinite love, there will be no limit to our love for God and for one another. John saw people from every nation continually bringing their worship to God. Our intimacy with God and friendship with one another will only grow throughout eternity.

Because nothing can be hidden, there'll be no pretense or hypocrisy in heaven. There will be nothing to tempt us away from God because we'll be reveling in his all-sufficiency. The very idea of desiring something other than God's best will be ludicrous. We won't look back wistfully or shamefully at our earthly sins. Rather, we'll only remember the amazing grace that redeemed us from our disobedience. Likewise, the first time we see those in heaven from whom we were estranged on earth, we'll immediately embrace them, celebrating Christ's forgiveness that allowed both of us

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to enjoy eternity in heaven.

Because we'll need nothing, there'll be no reason to be greedy or stingy. On the contrary, we'll use our heavenly treasures to honor God and bless those around us. We'll want to be as lavish with what we have as God has been with his riches. Every thought, every attitude, every deed, every desire, every joy...every moment will be lived in the light of God's love.

And that's precisely what it means to live on earth as it is in heaven. Look back at the above description of what it will be like to live in God's presence. Are we living like this today?

God doesn't want us to wait until we die to start living like citizens of heaven. Rather, he calls and equips us to be present ambassadors of his coming kingdom (2 Corinthians 5:8-20). Even when we find ourselves struggling against a culture that's opposed to God's values, we can live as if his kingdom has come, knowing that, one day, it will come:

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." (Jeremiah 29:4-7)

Living today in light of heaven doesn't come naturally. Because we are sinners, our wills are compromised by relentless self-centeredness. Like David, we must pray, "*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me*" (Psalm 51:10).

Even Jesus, who was sinless, understood the necessity of intentionally aligning his will with his Father's. In Gethsemane, Christ was conflicted as he considered the horrific hours immediately before him. He knew God's will, but he also knew how difficult being obedient would be. Overwhelmed with sorrow, "*...he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will'*" (Matthew 26:39).

When Christ directs us to pray, "*your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,*" he's commanding us to continually seek and obey his Father's will, understanding that God can redeem even the most heinous circumstances for his glory and our good (Romans 8:28). By honestly examining our motives and subjugating our wills to God's will, we will see our own lives transformed and so become agents of transformation for God's coming kingdom:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Philippians 3:20-21)

CHAPTER 10

PRACTICING REAL RELIANCE

v.11 **“Give us today our daily bread.”**

Christ teaches us to petition our Father for what we need, when we need it. This is a prayer of reliance, not self-indulgence. Let's look at what “daily bread” meant to the Jewish people.

After the Lord delivered the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt, he kept them in the wilderness forty years to teach them to trust him. Not long after they had been liberated, the whole nation complained to Moses and Aaron that it would have been better to live as slaves in Egypt where food abounded than to starve to death in the desert. The Lord responded by providing *manna*—their “daily bread”:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.” (Exodus 16:4-5)

God's provision came with conditions.

The Jews were to only collect the manna they needed for each day. The day before the Sabbath, they were to collect food for two days. On any other day, if they tried to keep the manna overnight, it would spawn maggots and smell terrible (Exodus 16:20). The Lord was teaching them that *he* was their trustworthy provider. And yet, they were unwilling to learn this lesson. Of the million or more who were freed from Egypt, God allowed only Joshua and Caleb to enter the Promised Land. All of the others who experienced the miracle of deliverance perished in their disobedience and lack of trust. The children of those delivered from Egypt entered the Promised Land, but their parents did not. Nonetheless, the concept of "daily bread" was central to the Jew's understanding of themselves and God.

When Jesus comes on the scene, he describes himself as God's ongoing and ultimate provision for his people. In John 6, Christ has an extended conversation with his followers who can't understand that "daily bread" means more than material provision:

Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world..."

Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread

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will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (John 6:32-33, 49-51)

In these rich verses, Jesus connects God's "daily bread" provision in the wilderness and the symbolism of the broken bread in the Passover feast with God's ultimate provision for our spiritual hunger that would be satisfied by his broken body on the cross—memorialized in the Last Supper (Matthew 26:26). His disciples, like their spiritual ancestors, were more concerned with their physical well-being than their spiritual condition. Indeed, Moses, in his farewell address to Israel, warns them that God's provision was more than just for their physical benefit:

He [the LORD] humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.... He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today. (Deuteronomy 8:3, 16-18)

God wants us to fully depend upon him. Even the ability to produce wealth comes from the Lord. If we trust in possessions and wealth rather than in God, we invalidate his generosity and grace. This is why Jesus

warned his followers about the powerful allure of money (“Mammon”). Rather, the Lord wants us to be good and faithful stewards of his provision—whether great wealth or extreme poverty. As the apostle Paul will later write:

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:12-13)

In verse 11 of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus instructs us to live with our palms open to receive God’s daily provision. We are also to live with hands outstretched in generosity; for it’s not “*my* daily bread” but rather God’s provision for our community and world. His provision is both personal and communal. Inherent in his blessing is the mandate to bless others.

We also are to understand that this “bread” is both physical, meeting our nutritional needs, and spiritual, meeting the deepest desires of our hearts. Jesus wants us to realize that *he* is the Bread of Heaven—the means by which our needs and the needs of the world are truly met. To trust in anyone or anything else is futile and amounts to the kind of idolatry that is expressly forbidden in the first and second commandments (Exodus 20:3-4).

To follow Jesus, our deliverer, through the wilderness of this world means we can trust his provision every day. As we learn to trust our Father,

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we will proclaim with the apostle Paul, “*And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 4:19).

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CHAPTER 11

BECOMING FORGIVEN
FORGIVERS

v. 12 **“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”**

This verse is best considered in light of these verses that immediately follow the Prayer:

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)

Jesus declares that our capacity to receive God's forgiveness depends directly on our capacity to forgive others. We need no further proof that our salvation is only realized in the context of community. There is no middle ground: God's grace either flows *through us* or it doesn't flow *in us*. [For more on this, read 1 John 2:9-11, 3:11-24, 4:7-21 where the apostle is adamant that those who love God must—by definition—extend that love to others.]

His Father's great mission is the redemption of

humanity. God's justice won't allow him to simply overlook our trespasses against him and others. He won't let evil go unchecked and unpunished forever. So rather than allowing us to receive the punishment our sins warrant, God steps into history in the person of Jesus and pays our debt "in full" on the cross (John 3:16). Notice that sin is referred to in accounting terms: it's a debt that requires payment. It's as if God holds the mortgage on our debt but then chooses to pay it off himself.

Why would God do something so audacious?

- In order to demonstrate both his impeccable justice *and* his infinite love.
- In order to show all of creation that *he alone* is worthy of our eternal adoration.
- In short: to glorify himself so that we might, in turn, praise him.

You and I are spiritually bankrupt.

Even our best efforts are tainted by sin, so we can never accrue enough righteous credits to offset our unrighteousness. In the Old Testament, God provided for his people to have their sins covered by shedding the blood of innocent animals. In the New Testament, Christ's sacrificial blood not only covers our sins, it also cleanses us from its stains. The assets in Jesus' account not only offset our debts, they also enrich us beyond all we can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). This is what makes Christianity different from every other religion--our God is *both judge and justifier*.

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God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.
(Romans 3:25-26)

But forgiveness is not free; it cost God his one and only Son. We can't earn his forgiveness; rather, we can only receive it by grace through faith. Forgiveness comes from God, is accomplished through Christ, and is received by trusting what he has done. It's a free gift, unmerited and unearned, miraculous and transformative. Until we understand the magnitude of God's love and mercy, we will remain unchanged. Not that our forgiveness of others will come automatically and naturally, but being *truly forgiven* can't help but eventually make us *true forgivers*. If we can't become conduits of forgiveness, it's a good bet that we haven't actually experienced saving grace.

In verse 12 of the Prayer, Jesus invites us to continually repent of our sins and experience God's forgiveness. But we do not come as criminals to a judge; rather, we come as beloved children to their Father. Reminded of our own sins and receiving his forgiveness; we now extend that same grace to those who have sinned against us.

In Matthew 18:23-31, Jesus offers a sobering parable of servant who owed a king an amount equal to untold years of wages. Because the servant was unable to pay this impossible debt, the master ordered

that the man, his wife, his children, and all he owned be sold. The debtor threw himself at the king's feet, begging for more time to make things right. Rather than simply extending the loan, the master had extravagant mercy and *cancelled* the man's debt altogether. Upon his release, the man came upon a fellow servant who couldn't repay an amount equal to 100 days of wages. Instead of demonstrating similar compassion, he had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. His fellow servants were outraged and reported back to their master everything that happened:

Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. [Jesus said,] "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."
(Matthew 18:32-35)

When we refuse to forgive others, we condemn ourselves to the torment and prison of our own anger and bitterness. But when we learn to forgive the sins of others—no matter how large or small—we open the cell door from the inside and walk out into the freedom that his forgiveness has purchased. The more we realize the magnitude of God's forgiveness in Christ, the more extravagant we will become in extending his grace and mercy to others.

Maybe someone has harmed us in some

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unimaginable way. Perhaps we've been abused or injured in a way that seems unforgivable. The first step toward wholeness is not acknowledging *their offense* against us, but rather confessing *our offense* against God.

How can that be?

The truth is that I will never have sufficient grace to forgive others until I admit the magnitude of my own trespass against God and what it cost the Father to forgive me. I must gaze upon Christ's cross, his crown of thorns, his bloodied and beaten face, the nails in his hands and feet, and be overwhelmed with the truth that *he did all this to forgive me*.

This is what it cost God to forgive me—and to forgive the man or woman who has sinned against me. In that moment, I not only receive Christ's forgiveness to settle my account with God, but also receive his sacrifice to settle their account with me. Only then will I be able to forgive others as I have been forgiven.

And why in the world wouldn't I?

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CHAPTER 12

RESISTING THE ALLURE OF SIN

v. 13 “And lead us not into temptation...”

Jesus understands that we fight a spiritual battle on two fronts: inner temptation and external evil. In the first part of verse 13, he addresses the internal threat of temptation. Here, Christ is not implying that God leads us into temptation. Rather, he commands us to pray for the wisdom and strength to avoid compromising situations. James, the half-brother of Jesus, writes:

When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:13-15)

We are tempted when we covet things God has not given us or when we take things he has forbidden us to have. For example, in Eden, the Lord tells Adam that they may eat from any tree in the garden except “...from

the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die” (Genesis 2:16-17). Just a few verses later:

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (Genesis 3:6)

The Lord gave Adam and Eve the capacity to choose, gave them a clear rule, and then warned them about the dire consequences of breaking it. The catalyst for their disobedience was not their free will, but a fallen angel, Satan, who charmed them into choosing their way over God’s: *“You will not certainly die,’ the serpent said to the woman. ‘For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”* (Genesis 3:4-5).

Satan understands what we think we need.

He knew that Eve admired the fruit’s beauty, craved its taste, and coveted the promise of god-like knowledge. Although they could have trusted the Lord to bless them with everything they needed, Adam and Eve chose to take what God had clearly prohibited. When they sinned; their bodies, minds, and spirits were corrupted.

They fell and took all of creation, including us, with them. Our free wills are now compromised. Although we know and often do the right thing, we regularly choose ungodliness over righteousness. The Bible calls these the *“acts of the sinful nature”*:

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The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

The apostle Paul understands that Christ dealt with the eternal penalty of sin on the cross. But he also proclaims that God wants to deal with our present addiction to sin by transforming us into Spirit-filled, Spirit-led, and Spirit-empowered children:

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Galatians 5:16-18)

Keeping God's law by our own power is impossible. Instead, we can resist temptation by living resurrected lives where his Spirit enlightens and empowers us. We learn to recognize what things tempt us so that we might, "Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). We intentionally steer clear of the chaos and destruction that sin can inflict in our lives and in the lives of those we love. As the apostle Paul writes:

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:12-13)

When we pray, “lead us not into temptation,” we are actually praying for God’s Holy Spirit to lead us into righteousness for his name’s sake (Psalm 23:3). We are praying for the radical reorientation of our lives under his Lordship:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:3-4)

When we pray, “lead us not into temptation,” we are actively cooperating with the Father as his Spirit exposes and annihilates every remnant of our fallen and rebellious nature, remaking us in the image of the Son:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander,

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and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.
(Colossians 5:3-10)

The best way to destroy temptation's appeal is to develop a voracious appetite for what the Father serves at his table of grace. The more we eat there, the more we'll crave his feast and the more we'll disdain the world's fare.

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CHAPTER 13

OVERCOMING EVIL

v. 13 “but deliver us from evil [or the evil one].”

In addition to the internal threat of temptation, every man and woman faces the external threat of evil. In verse 13, the word “evil” may also be translated as “the evil one.” The Bible reveals that the devil coveted God’s power and majesty, and was expelled from heaven along with the spiritual beings that conspired with him (Isaiah 14:12-15). Jesus understood that Satan’s rebellion is the original source of evil in the world.

Though there are people who dismiss the existence of the devil, the New Testament records that Jesus personally encountered him (Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:2-13) and that Christ released people from demonic possession (Matthew 4:24, 8:16-33, 9:32-34, 12:22-28, 17:14-18). If we are to take Jesus and the Gospels seriously, we must take the existence of personified, supernatural evil seriously.

Few would dispute that there is real evil in the world. Although it manifests itself in man’s inhumanity to man, its source is ultimately spiritual. Therefore, the

weapons of our warfare must also be spiritual. The apostle Paul encouraged the first century Church:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:10-12)

The earth is a spiritual battlefield. Because of Christ's victory on the cross, the outcome of this conflict is no longer in doubt. Jesus declares, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). For while Satan is God's adversary, he is not God's equal. As Martin Luther wrote in his magnificent hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God":

*For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,
and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal...
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure; for lo! His doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

Luther is proclaiming that just one word spoken in faith, the name of Jesus, is not only our surest defense, but also our greatest weapon. God does not *exempt* us from the hardship of battle; rather, he *redeems* it for his

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glory and our good:

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:8-11)

There are those who challenge the existence of a good God who could allow evil and suffering into his world. This is a legitimate question addressed throughout the whole narrative of Scripture. Here is a brief--but hopefully helpful--summary:

In order to have an authentic relationship with humanity, God created us with free will. The Lord did not intend us to be docile pets; rather, he made us in his own image for deep, intimate fellowship. With this freedom of choice came the capacity for disobedience. When Adam and Eve sinned, their rebellion ruined our world and everything in it. Consequently, their son committed fratricide and their grandchildren filled the world with every conceivable sin: “*The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time*” (Genesis 6:5).

Humanity and Satan—not God—are responsible for evil and suffering. And yet, from the creation of the world, the Lord had resolved to deliver humanity

from the sin it had yet to commit (Revelation 13:8).

By sending his Son to pay for our sin, God would demonstrate both his justice and his mercy, showing humanity the extent of his grace, and giving us undeniable reasons to love and worship him. The darkness of sin and brokenness would make the light of his love and redemption shine all the brighter. In the ultimate reversal, he would then redeem every circumstance—good *and* bad—to shape us into the men and women he destined us to be:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

As we mature in Christ, we appreciate how God uses trials and temptations to accomplish our ultimate perfection. James, the step-brother of Jesus, celebrated this truth when he wrote:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)

When we pray “*deliver us from evil,*” we’re praying that the Lord will use the evil we’ll inevitably

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encounter for his glory and our good.

We're saying, "God, rather than being overwhelmed by the extent of sin and suffering, we'll put on our spiritual armor and run toward the battle, trusting that no real harm can ever come to us because our lives are hidden in Christ."

We're proclaiming that God has won, that God will win, and that, "*...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us*" (Romans 8:37).

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CHAPTER 14

THE GRANDEST FINALE

v. 13(b) “for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

These words do not appear in the earliest manuscripts of Matthew and are therefore omitted from most modern translations. But that doesn't mean this phrase isn't biblical. Rather, this passage seems to be an adaptation of 1 Chronicles 29:11 where David proclaims,

Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.

So why were these words added to the earliest versions of Matthew's Gospel?

Perhaps Christ's followers had remembered that he frequently used this passage at the end of his prayers and decided it should be incorporated into the text. Or, perhaps the early Jewish Christians added this

doxology as part of their worship services and it “stuck.”

Jewish literature, especially poetry, was often characterized by parallelism and repetition. The author would present his main idea and then restate it for emphasis. This may explain why later manuscripts included the phrase “*For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*” These closing words echo the opening lines of the Lord’s Prayer where Jesus calls us to hallow our Father’s name and live in holy expectation of his coming kingdom.

In any case, this phrase is consistent with the witness of scripture and is useful in helping us pray well. Because the deeper our interaction with God, the more profoundly we will respond in worship. This passage is really a doxology—a short hymn of praise that focused on three reasons to exalt the Lord:

- God’s eternal kingdom
- God’s infinite power
- God’s unsurpassed glory

Let’s take each of these in order.

His Kingdom

The Lord promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation. Throughout history, Jews saw themselves inextricably connected to their national heritage and to the land God had promised them. And yet, foreign empires often occupied Israel and carried her people into exile. The Jews longed for the day Israel would be delivered and her glory restored. They

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looked toward heaven in eager expectation of a Messiah who would do both.

Many of the Jews who initially followed Jesus were disillusioned when he did not destroy Israel's enemies and restore their earthly kingdom. They didn't understand that the kingdom of God was bigger than Israel, the Roman Empire, and even the earth itself. Jesus revealed a coming cosmic kingdom where the whole universe—seen and unseen—would be redeemed and recreated in a unified heaven and earth. On that day, things *will be* on earth as they are in heaven: every creature living in loving worship of the King for eternity.

The Lord's Prayer crescendos with the proclamation that God alone is the rightful sovereign of this kingdom.

His Power

God holds his lordship by virtue of his omnipotence. By his infinite power, he created the universe and everything in it. By Christ's sacrifice, he destroyed the authority of sin, death, and hell. God our Father reigns supreme with his Son, our Savior, at his right hand (Ephesians 1:20, Hebrews 1:3). There is no power in heaven, on earth, or under the earth that he does not control. Nothing is beyond his dominion nor above his command.

The Lord's Prayer crescendos with the acclamation that our God is fully able to accomplish whatever he pleases.

His Glory

It pleased God to send his Son to take our sin so that we might know his glory. God's glory is his pure, unsearchable, blinding, purifying, terrifying, clarifying, transcendent, all-loving essence. When we experience even a glimpse of his presence, we cannot help but respond in praise. We give him glory because he is glorious. If we had not been redeemed by Christ's sacrifice, we would be consumed by God's glory. But since it pleased God for us to be adopted as his sons and daughters in Christ, we can now cry "Abba" to our Father as well as "Glory" to our Redeemer.

In Revelation, John sees living creatures worshipping at God's throne along with twenty-four elders whose godly lives have earned them heavenly crowns. These elders then do a curious thing--they take the crowns that they received by grace and return that glory to its source:

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."
(Revelation 4:9-11)

When something is glorified, it's magnified so that everyone might marvel at its true nature. When we glorify God, we make his true character and

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magnificence known to everyone around us. We proclaim him to the world as we praise him to his face.

The Lord's Prayer crescendos with endless adulation of God's glory.

Fittingly, the Prayer ends with the word, "Amen," an affirmation meaning, "So be it."

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EPILOGUE

For too many in Christendom, the Lord's Prayer has become a mumbled blur of magic words we say in the foxhole or the hospital room. But for those who take the time to weigh each word and speak each phrase with intentionality and immediacy, this prayer can be profoundly life-changing.

For the past several years, I've tried to begin each day with a fresh offering of this prayer to my Heavenly Father. Whether at the breakfast table, in the shower, or on the way to work, these amazing words have had a way of focusing and centering my life like nothing else has. The hardest part is not repeating the words by rote, but rather slowly verbalizing each verse—usually in my own words rather than in the traditional King James English.

I challenge you to make the Lord's Prayer as central to your morning routine as that first cup of coffee or glance at the daily headlines. Could there be anything more essential to living as Jesus did than praying as Jesus prayed?

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As I've meditated on the Prayer, other verses came to mind on its themes of worship, sonship, obedience, provision, forgiveness, spiritual warfare, and kingdom consummation.

In the summer of 2017, I had the privilege of assembling these thoughts into a study I led for my dear friends in the Mid-Life Singles Group at Church of the City in our hometown of Franklin, Tennessee. These five verses expanded into more than 150 verses and scripture citations filling 14 chapters. Indeed, more than thirty percent of this study consists of verses that illuminate the central passage in Matthew 6.

My prayer is that this Prayer will draw you closer to “Our Father in Heaven” and that this scripture study will—to paraphrase the hymnist—“tune our hearts to sing His praise.”

Vince Wilcox

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PS: If you're one of our daughters (or future grandchildren), I pray that one day—when I'm in heaven waiting for the restoration of all things—that you'll read these words, hear my voice, be encouraged by these truths, and look forward to that reunion with your mother and me.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vince Wilcox holds a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies (Distinguished Major) from the University of Virginia, a Masters of Science in Education (Guidance & Counseling) from Old Dominion University, and a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree from Nashville School of Law.

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