

The Lord's Prayer
Our Father in Heaven
Matthew 6:5-9

The Lord's Prayer takes very little time to pray, and yet this is *the* prayer Jesus taught His disciples. It has transformed and is transforming the world in exactly the way it is worded. When Martin Luther's good friend and barber once asked him how to pray, he told him it's like cutting hair where he must focus his thoughts and senses on the hair and scissors, lest he cut a man's nose, mouth, or throat: "How much more does a prayer need to have the undivided attention of the whole heart alone, if it is to be a good prayer!"

Summary of the Text

Jesus tells His disciples not to be like the hypocrites who don't truly want to pray but to be seen praying; they get what they want, which is not answers to prayers (v. 5). Instead, go into your room and only once the door is shut, pray to God who sees you and will reward you openly (v. 6). We learn here that where we pray matters. Regarding how we are to pray, Jesus forbids the vain repetitions of the heathen who think a god hears because they repeat themselves (v. 7). Don't pray like them because your Father knows what you need even before you ask Him (v. 8). Instead, ask Him in this manner: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name (v. 9).

A Prayer Like No Other

Some dull scholars of religion say all religions are basically the same: they have clergy, holy books, worship, doctrines, and practices involving the divine. But this provides no insight; it's just to say they're all religions. Would it make sense to say all sports are the same because they have rules, competition, scores, judges, and athletes? That curling and rugby or baseball and bowling are basically the same game? They buy this about religions because they believe all gods are basically manifestations of the same god, and therefore all paths to him must be about the same. The living God reveals how utterly different He is: "I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God" (Is. 44:6). Since He is the living and triune God, prayer addressed to Him is completely different. When prayed true faith, the Lord's Prayer transforms the individual and the world he prays about. The Lord's answers this prayer.

How Not To Pray

More prayer is not necessarily better. Those who posted up on street corners and in synagogues loved to be seen by men, and being seen is all they accomplished (v. 5). This wasn't theoretical—people were doing it in Jerusalem and all over Israel, and Jesus prophetically calls out the hypocrisy. If you were listening to Him say these things (and aren't we?) and then saw someone praying in public, your first reaction would be, "Uh oh." This condemnation would lead to conflict (cf. Matt. 23:14). Public prayer isn't necessarily sinful, but we should watch our hearts and make sure our words are for God and not for those listening ("Lord, you know Smith really needs to hear this"). Like fasting and good works, prayer should be done privately so that God will hear and bless us openly (vv. 6, 4). The only time in Scripture someone prays righteously out loud so that others will hear is when Daniel opens his windows to pray in defiance of the decree to pray only to the king (Dan. 6:7, 10). So we know it's okay to pray in order to get thrown into the lions' den. Jesus also forbids vain repetitions and the belief that effective prayer is measured by word count (v. 7). Much pagan prayer is simply rote, repeating the same thing thoughtlessly. This indicates the nature of the gods who are in need of information or exaltation: "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him" (v. 8). God doesn't need information or anything else from us, so we can pray in confidence and peace that He knows exactly what we need and will answer us accordingly.

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The Good Father

Many have concluded that because God knows what we need, we need not ask Him. This is the hyper-Calvinist (not) at prayer. Carnal reason sets God's omniscience and foreknowledge against our will and actions, His sovereignty against our freedom. Jesus says the Father knows what we need before we ask, so ask Him with that wisdom in mind. He's the good Father from whom every good and perfect gift comes down (Jms. 1:17). We can't explain how divine sovereignty and human responsibility work together because we are not God—sovereign and omniscient—but we can understand and rejoice that they do. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling because God is in you to will and to do for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12). You work out what He works in, and not with cool stoicism either. Jesus knows down to the rooster crowing what will take place in His passion, and yet Judas betrays Him and Peter denies Him in complete freedom of will. God ordains the means and the ends of whatsoever comes to pass, and if you need to understand God in order to worship Him, you can only bow down before an idol that fits in your brain. Jesus calls us to pray to our Father. We can pray "my Father" as He did elsewhere, but the first-person plural shows us the corporate nature of coming to the God and Father of all. Neither Jesus nor any of the faithful in Scripture pray to saints or angels. We don't know if they can hear us and we are forbidden from divination, trying to contact the dead (Lev. 19:31; Is. 8:19; 1 Sam. 28). God our Father is the way out of fatherlessness. Don't measure God by earthly fathers, but earthly fathers by God our Father (Eph. 3:15).

The Prayer of Faith

We've seen God isn't pleased with hypocritical, ostentatious, long, and repetitive prayers. He likes faith, which is trust in Him: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). Praying the way Jesus teaches is an act of faith. A good dad wants his kid to ask for good things, believing he will give what is best for the child. That's how God is. If we think God isn't a good Father and won't bless us, how can He be pleased? An earthly father can't truly love a child and be complacent about their false accusations or entitled mindset. That kid will be hurt and hurt others by proud and selfish delusions. Faith is such a simple and profound gift: to believe God is and that He rewards those who seek Him. If you come to God truly you will be made aware of your finitude and sinfulness. Who am I to call on the Almighty? Given the Lord's instructions, how can I refuse? You must call on Him not just for salvation (Rom. 10:13), but diligently in prayer for blessing.

An Easy Yoke

The Lord's Prayer takes 30 seconds to pray and no longer if you mean it. If you do, then it will come naturally to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). This Prayer has categories that we fill out according to particular needs and circumstances: adoring God, desiring His name to be honored and revered as holy, asking for His will to be accomplished here, petitioning for our needs, seeking to be forgiven as we forgive others, and meditating on His kingdom, power, and glory, Amen. This isn't hard. Find the unbelief in your prayers or lack of prayers. Do you not ask, or do you ask doubting the good giver? Pray in faith and then thank Him when He answers.