

## Week 1 ~ The Lord's Prayer

*"But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," (Matthew 5:44, NIV)*

I won't lie, there are times when I would rather bad-mouth and complain about someone who "done me wrong" than bow my head and heart and pray for that person who makes my day less than what I would like for it to be. But Jesus says here, in Matthew that we are to love those whom we could consider enemies, and we love them by praying for them.

Prayer transforms hearts; I don't exactly know how, but that's the miracle of it. I don't have to know how it works in order to experience the power of it. And here's the thing, it doesn't just have the power to change the heart of the one being prayed for, it's powerful to transform the heart of the pray-er as well. Just the fact that I consider a person fodder for complaint is enough to prove that my heart needs the kind of transformation that prayer provides.

What do your enemies prove about the condition of your own heart? And, what might God want to do in your situation?

Who are your "enemies" and how might you lift them before the Lord?

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The Lord's Prayer is familiar to so many for it is said weekly in countless Christian churches throughout the world. It is memorized by kids in Sunday School and catechism classes as standard Christian education for children. And it is pasted into any number variety of occasions as though the mere recitation of it would turn an otherwise normal gathering into something of a sacred offering. As with many things that find their way into tradition, the Lord's Prayer has, for many, lost its meaning and value.

Our aim this week is to reclaim the power of the prayer that our Lord Jesus taught us to pray. It would do us good to remember that Jesus said that this is HOW we should pray, not WHAT we should pray. So with that in mind, let's see how Jesus says we should pray—phrase by phrase—Matthew 6:9-13.

*"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (vs. 9)*

Jesus starts by putting the Father first. He addresses God's preeminent place as above all—in heaven—and yet there's intimacy inferred in the prescription of *Father*. Jesus follows God's position with praise—*hallowed* (holy, set apart, glorified) *be your name*.

\*Start your prayer time by addressing God and praising his name. Take time to elaborate and try not to rush through. Move on to the next phrase only after you feel you've personally addressed God as fully as you can.

\*Example: "God, in heaven, you are The Great Creator and none can compare with you. Though you make your home on high, you reach down to inhabit my space as well. You are good and mighty; you are true; you are magnificent and utterly mysterious . . ."

*"Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (vs.10)*

Q: What are the characteristics of God's Kingdom?

A: Love, goodness, mercy, patience, self-control, joy, hope, peace, and on the list goes.

Q: What is the will of God?

A: Anything in keeping with the whole of his Kingdom values/characteristics

So . . . when we pray, *"Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"* we are praying for these values to become our values and that we might act accordingly, not just us but the totality of all the earth. We are also acknowledging that, through Christ, these Kingdom principles are already at work in us and among us, only that we might recognize them more and add to them ourselves by winning souls for Christ and by sowing seeds of love along the way.

\*Ask God to reveal His Kingdom ideals to you. How would your life—your home, your relationships, your health, your attitude, your neighborhood, your community, your country, your world—change if it operated as flawlessly as you imagine heaven might operate? Now begin to pray these things, no matter how foolish it may seem. Ask God to help you embrace, more fully, his Kingdom and to act accordingly.

*"Give us today our daily bread" (vs.11)*

God provides. He wants us to come to him with our needs and even our desires, seeking him in all things. Like manna in the wilderness, God will not leave us empty and bereft, but he is also not wasteful and foolish in his provisions.

While "daily bread" certainly represents more than food, it is best understood as representing physical needs—financial provision, health, job opportunity, protection, etc.

\*What is it you are needing and desiring? Ask. (And, in light of the previous phrase, how might asking, according to his *will*[*be done*], change how and what you request?)

*“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (vs. 12)*

Forgiveness. Jesus teaches us to seek forgiveness in the same manner that we are to forgive others. Completely. Jesus died for our sins one time, for all (of) time; which means, if we’ve asked for forgiveness of something, it’s done, forgiven. Period. He wants us to extend the same measure of grace in forgiving others.

\*Read verses 14 and 15 to glean more from Jesus regarding forgiveness.

\*Take time to confess your sins. I’ve found that the more specific, the better. Then, begin to forgive others. If this is new territory for you, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you on your journey of freedom in forgiveness.

\*Example: “Lord, please forgive me for my sins of slander, laziness, speeding, jealousy (citing specific examples). And Lord, I forgive Barbara for the mean things she said about me. My heart is still hurt, but I choose to no longer hold that against her and remain, myself, in unforgiveness. With your help, my soul will experience the freedom my confession, this day, has wrought. Let it be so.”

*“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (vs. 13)*

While this verse may seem a bit confounding, in essence, we are acknowledging God’s sovereignty over all things, even evil. Jesus, here, testifies that Satan—the evil one—is real, and we would do well to steer clear of him. And with guidance from God, being attuned to his Spirit and to his ways, we might be delivered from Satan and his schemes. We should not be so foolish to ignore Evil and its affects.

Like Jesus, we are all tempted by Satan. While Jesus prayed for deliverance from evil, for the believer today, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ is the first step in victory over sin and death.

\* God knows where you are most likely to be tripped up. Ask God to reveal your weaknesses, be your strength and your guide in averting evil, and to give you wisdom so you might prevail and live the life Christ died to give you. Take time to acknowledge Jesus and the strength his sacrifice provides you, even today.



## Reflection Questions

1. What did you most enjoy about prayer this week?
2. What was most challenging?
3. How did your prayers change throughout the week as you engaged in praying the Lord's Prayer in this way?
4. What revelations, if any, did you receive in prayer this week? Were any directly related to praying in this way?
5. What are you most likely to take away from this prayer exercise?

