


week
#19



SMALL GROUPS

| Praying without Preaching | Coram Deo | Study |
|---|---|---------------------------------|
| We do not pray to sound pious, make a point, or further an agenda. Prayer is a time for praying, not preaching. | Private prayer helps conform us to Christ. How much time do you spend praying in private? | Open It Explore It Get It |

“When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (v. 6). Matthew 6:5–8

Praying without Preaching

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus assumes new covenant believers will maintain the old covenant practices of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. It is not *if* we will give to the needy but *when* (Matt. 6:2). Fasting is spoken of similarly (v. 16). Finally, Jesus describes prayer as a routine part of Christian piety in today’s passage (v. 5). What Matthew Henry says about Matthew 6:5–8 could well be said about giving to the needy as well as fasting: “You may as soon find a living man who does not breathe, as a living Christian who does not pray.”

Our Lord’s directions for prayer, like the other two aforementioned acts of piety, are chiefly concerned to steer us away from hypocrisy. *Hypokrites*, the Greek word behind the English *hypocrite*, refers originally to an actor; thus, Christ is warning us against pretending to be someone other than who we are when we give, pray, and fast. In Jesus’ day, men might pray aloud in the synagogue and speak with lofty phrases and false solemnity. At different points in the day, people might hear the trumpet signaling them to stop, face Jerusalem, and pray. Many who love the praise of men make sure they are in public at

these times and show their spirituality to the whole world (v. 5).

Jesus’ solution to this problem is a robust personal prayer life (v. 6). The early church well understood that He does not forbid public prayers (Acts 4:23–31), only those designed to impress other people. **We do not pray to sound pious, make a point, or further an agenda. Prayer is a time for praying, not preaching.**

Furthermore, Christ cautions us not to “heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do” (Matt. 6:7), a reference to the attempts of pagans to manipulate the gods through lengthy,



Private prayer helps conform us to Christ. How much time do you spend praying in private?

but meaningless words. Again, the issue is really one of intent and not length as we are told elsewhere to persevere in prayer (Luke 18:1–8). God has no need to be reminded of our needs (Matt. 6:8). Therefore, simple, direct, and sincere prayers to Him suffice. This does not mean we may only share our concerns with Him one time and one time only; rather, we may not lift up our needs with the intent of “forcing” our Creator to act because of the number of words we use or the particular formula we are following.

Coram Deo (before the face of God)

We pray “not to inform God or instruct Him but to beseech Him closely, to be made intimate with Him, by continuance in supplication; to be humbled; to be reminded of our sins” (John Chrysostom, Homilies on

the Gospel of Saint Matthew, 19.4). Private prayer helps conform us to Christ. How much time do you spend praying in private? If you pray in public more than you do in private, you might be more concerned with how others see you than with how God sees you¹.

Passages for Further Study

Ecclesiastes 5:1-3

Luke 5:16

Open It!

1) Besides your family and coworkers, who do you spend the most time with? Why do you invest so much time together? How do you feel when you are with them?



2) Are you a talker, a listener or somewhere in between? Explain your answer.

Read It | Matthew 6:5-8

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

Explore It

1. What did the hypocrites like to do when praying?
2. Why did they employ such tactics?
3. According to verse seven what type of vocabulary should we refrain from using while praying?

Get It

1. Three times Jesus shares the phrase, “when you pray”. Why is it so crucial for a Christian to be active in prayer?

Charles Spurgeon puts it this way...

Prayer pulls the rope below and the great bell rings above in the ears of God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so languidly; others give but an occasional pluck at the rope; but he who wins with heaven is the man who grasps the rope boldly and pulls continuously, with all his might. (Feathers for Arrows)



2. If prayer is of such great importance, what keeps so many Christians from praying on a regular basis? What are some things that hinder you personally from praying more?
3. In verses 5-8 Jesus compares true prayer with false prayer as characterized in two different types of people. What are those two types of people and how would you describe their approach to prayer?
4. Jesus seems to take umbrage with certain practices of prayer. With what about these practices does He take issue? Are any of these practices wrong if the heart of the person praying is good?

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Some have taken Jesus' words in verse six to mean that public prayer should not be a practice for the believer. Although prayer is private communication between God and His child, Jesus is not forbidding public prayer (which He even carried out in Mt 14:19 and 15:36), but rather the motive behind such prayer. Public prayer is an overflow of much prayer in secret. The early church met together for collective prayer (Acts 2:42; 12:12; 13:3; 14:23; 20:36). Jesus' main point was not so much where believers pray, but why we pray. Is it for men or for God? Public versus private prayer however does potentially provide a measure or test of one's motives, for the person who prays more in public than in private reveals that he or she is less interested in God's approval than in human praise.

The street corners were a normal place for prayer, because devout Jews would stop wherever they were at the appointed hour for prayer, even if they were walking down the street or visiting at the corner. The appointed hours were at nine in the morning, noon, and three in the afternoon, perfect times for people who wanted to be seen praying because these were busy times of the day².

1. Where are some of the street corners and synagogues when it comes to your prayer life?
2. What are some of the pros and cons of both private and public prayers? Should we limit our time to only one kind of prayer?

The word **"you"** is **plural** in Mt 6:5 and 6:7 but in 6:6 it is **singular** emphasizing private, personal, one-on-one communion as in a child who goes into his father's study and has his ear.

3. How can our location or setting impact our prayer times?

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4. Does praying proper prayers mean they will be answered? What rewards come as a result of praying properly?

Phil Newton writes...

You can picture the scene. The rabbi calls upon Brother So-and-so to pray in the synagogue, and then he begins the most polished, flowery prayer that the congregation had ever heard. Once he sat down the members of the congregation were awed by his knowledge and use of language and obvious spirituality! He sat with a smug grin, knowing that he had impressed the whole congregation by what he had said. Jesus declared that he got what he wanted, the approval of men. But he did not receive what he prayed for in the least.

“Into your room” describes any place of privacy. The idea is to go into the inner room of a house, normally without any windows opening outside, so that you have the most private location possible. This is a direct contrast with the hypocrites who sought out the most prominent public place to pray. The focus is on the intimacy of communion with God in one’s heart, which is at the center of all prayer, whether it happens to be given publicly or privately.

5. What are some modern day “empty phrases” in our prayers?
6. What is it about the use of certain words that causes people to think someone is spiritual?
7. Some have taken this passage to mean that all prayers should be simple. Does this exclude prayers that are full of knowledge and depth? Explain your answer.
8. How should the fact that God knows what we need change the way we pray?



Prayer

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9. Paul encourages us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to “pray without ceasing.” How does one go about this amidst the busyness of life?

10. Name one specific way that Jesus’ teaching on prayer here might alter your approach to prayer.

11. In what ways can you begin to make prayer more of a priority in your life? What practical things can you do starting today to make this a reality?

¹ R.C. Sproul, *Praying without Preaching* From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: www.ligonier.org

² Ron Mattoon - *Treasures From Proverbs*, Volume One.

week #20



The Lord's Prayer

"...the primary intent that our Savior seems to have had in revealing the Lord's Prayer to us was to give us a model for how we are to structure all of our prayers."

Coram Deo

If our prayers are not filled with petitions for the Lord to be glorified in all the earth, we probably need to restructure our intercession.

Study

Open It
Read It
Get It

"Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples'" (v. 1) Luke 11:1–4

The Lord's Prayer

Believers are to pray according to how God commands, and one of the ways that we know what He has commanded us to pray for is to consider the things mentioned "in the prayer Christ our Lord himself taught us" (The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 118). This prayer, of course, is the Lord's Prayer (Q&A 119).

Without a doubt, the Lord's Prayer is one of the most well-known and beloved portions of Scripture. The text that gives this prayer to us, Luke 11:1–4 (see also Matt. 6:9–13), is one of the first passages that most believers memorize, and the prayer itself has

been an essential part of Christian piety since it was first given to the church by her Lord. No one can honestly doubt the prayer's importance, so it is easy to see why the Heidelberg Catechism and the major creeds, confessions, and catechisms of the church devote so much time to it.

In considering the Lord's Prayer, we need to recognize the purpose for which it was given. While it is certainly proper to pray the prayer as it is given to us in the New Testament, especially when we think carefully about what we are saying, it does not seem that

Jesus gave us this prayer, first and foremost, as words to recite verbatim. Instead, **the primary intent that our Savior seems to have had in revealing the Lord's Prayer to us was to give us a model for how we are to structure all of our prayers.** We draw this conclusion from what prompted Christ to give this prayer to His disciples in the first place.

As we read in Luke 11:1, one of the disciples came to Jesus asking Him, essentially, how to pray and not what to pray. The distinction between asking how to pray and asking what to pray is not merely a semantical one. It shows us that the disciple who

Coram Deo

Before the face of God

Using the Lord's Prayer as a model involves prioritizing our petitions according to the prayer's structure. The first thing for which Jesus prays is that God's name would be hallowed and that His kingdom would come. That the world would recognize God as holy and seek His kingdom is to be the very first thing we seek in prayer. If our prayers are not filled with petitions for the Lord to be glorified in all the earth, we probably need to restructure our intercession.

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brought his request to our Lord was looking more for an outline of the kind of prayer that is pleasing to God than a precise set of words to be offered every time he went before His Creator in prayer. Being a good Jew, the disciple would have known that praying for his needs was approved by God; what he needed to know was the context in which he should ask for such needs to be supplied. So, Jesus gave Him this context in the Lord's Prayer, providing His church with a model for structuring our prayers that will help us in every generation.

Open It!

1. Tell the group about your earthly father. How would you describe him? What things are most admirable about him? What are/were some areas of weakness?
2. What is your experience with the Lord's Prayer?

Pray! This present imperative is a command calling for us to make prayer the habit of our lives. Prayer is not to be a pastime but a lifestyle. "Prayer is beyond any question the highest activity of the human soul. Man is at his greatest and highest when, upon his knees, he comes face to face with God"²

Read It | Matthew 6:9-15

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

Get It

1. What is your experience with prayer? Are you satisfied with it? What things keep you from a satisfying prayer life?
2. What are some of the benefits of repetition or traditional prayers? What are some of the drawbacks of them?
3. The Lord's Prayer has become a prayer for all people, whether they are believers or non-believers. In what ways does this prayer work only for a true follower of Christ?
4. How will the prayers of a Christian person differ from a non-believer's prayers? Why the differences?

Pray then like this.

What does the phrase imply? Note that Jesus did not say when you pray, pray these exact words! This prayer was never meant to be a ritualistic, rote prayer for regular recital but rather a guide for praying "in this way" or "after this manner." We are to use this prayer as a pattern, not as a substitute. The problem with prayer by rote memory is that this kind of prayer becomes meaningless repetition. Jesus told His audience to "pray in this way," in the context of just having stated not to use meaningless repetition. So clearly Jesus is presenting a pattern for our prayers, not the only words to use in prayer. The Lord's Prayer was never intended to be used as a repetitious petition, but as the guide to how His followers should pray.

If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. "Father" is the Christian name for God.³

5. What is wrong with the two kinds of prayer that Jesus attacks in Matthew 6:5-8? How is the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 a contrast to these?

6. What is so amazing about addressing God as "Our Father in heaven"? (see Isaiah 40:12-26; John 1:12-13; Romans 8:14-17) How should this affect our prayers?

Hallowed be Your Name

This is the petition that makes hypocrites out of most of us. For we can say "Father" with grateful sincerity, but when we pray "Hallowed be Your Name," we say this with the guilty knowledge that, as we pray, there are areas of our life in which His Name is not hallowed and in which, furthermore, we don't want it to be hallowed. When we say "Hallowed by Thy Name," we are praying,

"May the whole of my life be a source of delight to You and may it be an honor to the name which I bear, which is Your Name. Hallowed be Your Name."

The trouble is that we so frequently know there are great areas of our life that are not hallowed. There are certain monopolies which we have reserved to ourselves, privileged areas which we do not wish to surrender, where the name of our boss or the name of our girlfriend or some other dear one means more to us than the name of God. But when we pray this, if we pray it in any degree whatsoever of sincerity or openness or honesty, we are praying,

"Lord, I open to You every closet, I am taking every skeleton out for You to examine. Hallowed be Thy Name."

There cannot be any contact with God, any real touching of His power, any genuine experiencing of the glorious fragrance and wonder of God at work in human life until we truly pray, and the second requisite of true prayer is that we say "Hallowed be Thy Name."⁴

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7. Why should God's name be important to us? How is God's name hallowed? Why don't we have a greater desire to see God's name hallowed?

When we pray "Your kingdom come," we pray three things:

First, we pray for the final and ultimate establishment of God's kingdom. We pray for the day when all creation will freely call Him "Dearest Father" — "Abba." There is an almost martial, triumphant ring to "Your kingdom come." Come, O Lord! Second, we pray "Your kingdom come" so we will be conformed to His will in this world. As we pray this, we hand ourselves over to the grace of God so He may do with us as He pleases. Your kingdom come in my life. Use me

for Your kingdom. Third, "Your kingdom come" is a prayer that God's rule will come to others through us. It is a prayer for Christ to work His revolutionary power in a fallen world. Your kingdom come in my family, my job, my city, my nation. This is a big prayer that depends on a big God. And when truly prayed, it makes for a big life. Is your life, is my life, big enough to pray, "Your kingdom come?"⁵

8. What is God's kingdom? What does it mean for the kingdom to "come"? In what ways has God's kingdom already come and in what ways has it not yet been fulfilled?
9. When are we most excited about the coming of God's kingdom? When are we least excited?



(Continued)

10. Besides simply praying for “His kingdom to come” what other things can a believer do to help usher in this kingdom on earth?

11. In what ways is God’s will being done in heaven? What does it mean for God’s will to be done “on earth as it is in heaven?”

12. When is “Your will be done” hardest to pray? What does it take to pray this during those times?

13. Why might people neglect prayers that correspond to the first half of the Lord’s Prayer? How can we rectify this?

Leaders:

Allow for some extra time this week for a prolonged time of prayer. Instead of focusing this time on weekly requests use this time to pray through some of the following principles that we have learned in our study.

Spend time:

- Reflecting on “Our Father.” What “fatherly things” can we give Him thanks for?
- Praying that God’s kingdom would be made known to our world as it is known in heaven.
- Confessing different areas where we have failed to hallow the name of God by living life our own ways.

¹ R.C. Sproul, Jesus’ Teaching on Oaths. *From Ligonier Ministries*, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: www.ligonier.org

² Lloyd-Jones, D. M. *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*.


³ Packer, J: *Knowing God*.

⁴ Sermon “The Pattern Prayer” by Ray Steadman.

⁵ Hughes, R. K. *Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*. Crossway Books.

week

#21



AFFECTIONS

SMALL GROUPS

| Deliver Us from Evil | Coram Deo | Study |
|--|---|---|
| <p>“Even though the Lord does not allure us with sin, the Bible is clear He allows His people to go through times of testing.”</p> | <p>“Satan is called the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10) because he likes to make us feel as if God has not forgiven us.”</p> | <p>Open It</p> <p>Read It</p> <p>Get It</p> |

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” –Matthew 6:13

Deliver Us from Evil

As recorded in the Gospel according to Matthew, the final words of the Lord’s Prayer are “lead us not into temptation” (6:13). But how can Jesus speak such words? Does not the Bible tell us that God does not tempt anyone (James 1:13)?

This verse has the potential to cause us much consternation, but looking at a couple of different grammatical considerations will help us understand exactly what Jesus is praying in today’s passage. In the first place, Matthew 6:13 need not refer to a direct enticement to sin that we typically associate with the word *temptation*. If our Savior was implying that the Father can lure us into sin, then He would be

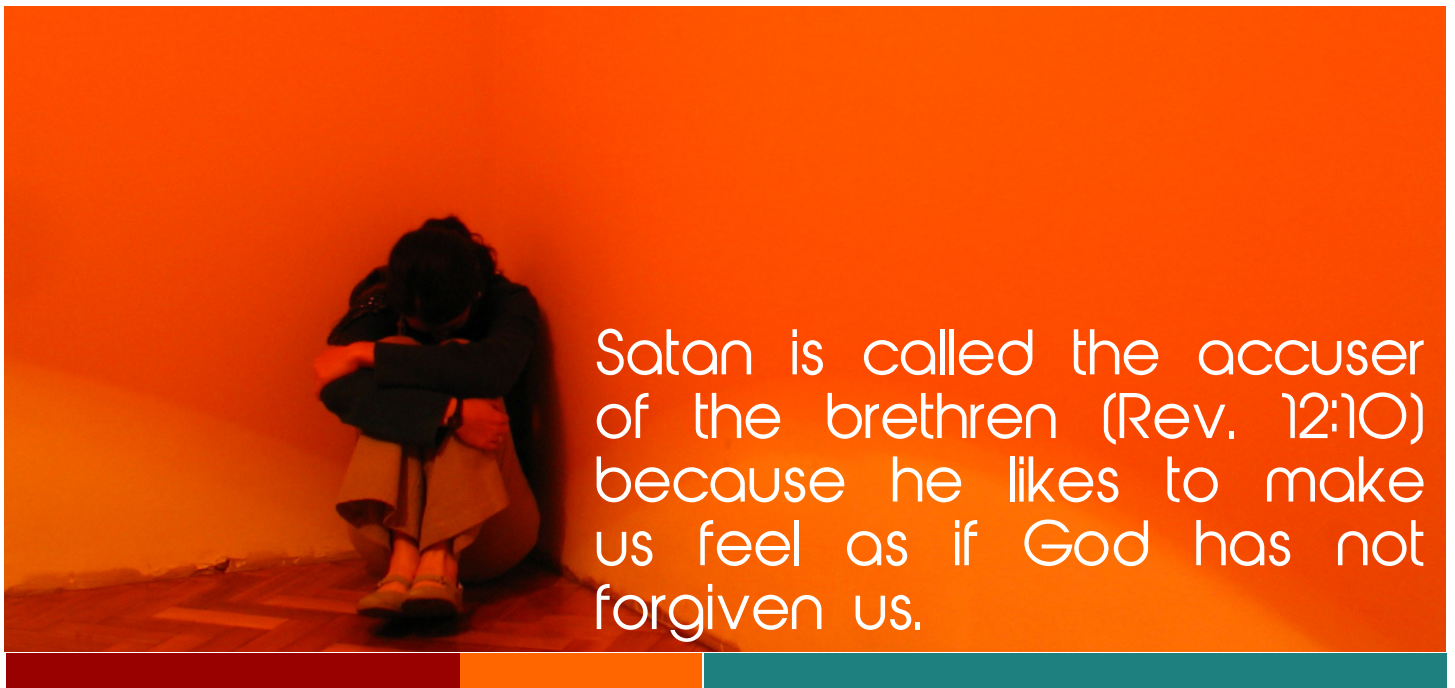
contradicting the witness of Scripture. However, this is not what He is saying.

Even though the Lord does not allure us with sin, the Bible is clear He allows His people to go through times of testing. For example, Jesus Himself was tested in the wilderness by Satan as a means to fulfill His vocation as the second Adam (Matt. 4:1–11). In this case, the Creator permitted the Devil to entice the Messiah to sin, but God Himself was not the agent of temptation. When Jesus asks the Father to lead us not into temptation, He is imploring Him not to allow His people to face an insurmountable test in which our enemy tempts us to sin.

The parallel clause “but deliver us from evil” (6:13) further shows this to be true. *Poneros* is the Greek term

lying behind “evil” in this passage, but this word is better translated “evil one.” Jesus therefore shows us that we should pray for protection against Satan. We may thus pray: “Lord, please do not let me be exposed to a time of testing in which I will face the full fury of the Devil’s assault. Protect me from the enemy and deliver me from his hands.”

As those totally dependent on the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), we should pray daily to be delivered from Satan’s assault. The Father may allow testing to come our way, but He promises to sustain us and help us be faithful to Him (1 Cor. 10:13). All we have to do, this prayer shows, is ask Him for help. When we are faced with an onslaught



Satan is called the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10) because he likes to make us feel as if God has not forgiven us.

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of temptation and evil, let us implore the Lord for rescue.

Coram Deo (before the face of God)

Satan is called the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10) because he likes to make us feel as if God has not forgiven us. But guilt is an objective reality, and if we have turned to Jesus, we have been cleansed — objectively, truly, and in reality. If you think the Lord holds your past against you, pray for deliverance from the evil one and know that you are forgiven. Pray also for Christian brothers and sisters who are having trouble embracing the Father's mercy.

Passages for Further Study

Psalms. 71; 109; 144

Isaiah 31:5

Romans 8:31–39

2 Timothy 4:18

Open It!

1. What are some things that you need on a daily basis?
2. Describe when you helped someone in a time of great difficulty or when someone helped you in a time of trouble.

deliver us.

Read It | Matthew 6:9-15

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

Get It

In the second half of this prayer, God is brought directly into the tiniest details of our everyday lives. If the first half of the prayer seems too esoteric, if the first half seems too theoretical, if it seems too theological — it shouldn't, but if for some reason it does — you will certainly understand and draw near to the second half of the Lord's Prayer, because it is meant for you and the problems you are facing in your daily life. Let's take a look at the second half of the prayer and analyze it a little bit more. It contains three petitions: "give us our daily bread," "forgive us our debts," and "lead us not into temptation." That covers provision, pardon, and protection. Ray Pritchard, *And When You Pray*

If you think about those three things, they take care of all the needs of life:

- **Provision takes care of your present.**
- **Pardon takes care of your past.**
- **Protection takes care of your future.**

1. How is it possible to pray for yourself without being selfish? What do you normally pray for regarding yourself?

2. In what areas of your life are you most conscious of your dependence on God?

3. Within the early church there was a view that saw the words “daily bread” as something spiritual and not simply the bread that we eat. This teaching assumes that Jesus wouldn’t speak to something as mundane as bread. Why is it appropriate and good for Christians to pray for our physical need for daily provision?

We are here taught to acknowledge our entire dependence on God for the supply of our daily necessities. As Israel required daily manna so we require daily “bread.” We confess that we are poor, weak creatures in need (“poor in spirit” Matthew 5:3), and beseech our Maker to take care of us. We ask for “bread” as the simplest of our wants, and in that word we include all that our bodies require².

4. Read Exodus 16. What does the story of God's provision of manna and quail teach us about the way God supplies our daily needs and how we must receive such provision?

5. How would it change your outlook if you prayed “give us this day our daily bread” with meaning every morning? Why pray for only today’s bread?

6. What keeps us from greater dependence on God for our physical needs? How can we increase this awareness?

7. It seems quite clear in the prayer that followers of Jesus Christ are to have a hand-to-mouth existence. What does this statement mean? Do you agree or disagree?

8. How does this relate to saving money, building your investments, and amassing personal wealth? What might be some implications for our church?

In the Peril of a Storm

It will help us to understand the spirit of the prayer to remember that the word temptation does not mean primarily to allure to sin. To tempt is to try, to test, to prove. New ships are proved before they are entrusted with lives or treasure upon the sea.


Anchors are tested before they are allowed to become the only hope of a vessel in the peril of a storm.



God proved Abraham, putting his faith and obedience to the test. After the

trial the angel said to him, “Now I know that you fear God.” Abraham had stood the test. **Jesus was tempted before He began His public ministry, that He might be a proved deliverer.** We put our hand into God’s in the morning, and we ask Him to lead us through the day. We know not what experiences may come to us and we ask Him not to bring us into difficult testings. The prayer is a request that in the doing of God’s will for the day we may not be brought into places where it will be hard for us to be faithful.³

9. If God cannot tempt us and trials are beneficial (James 1:2, 13), then what is the meaning of verse 13? How might our lives be different if we made this petition a daily pursuit?
10. Why is it important to remember that God never solicits us to do evil? What happens when we forget this truth?
11. What are we asking when we pray, “lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one?” What should the Christian’s attitude be about trials and temptations? (James 1:2-4, 12-15)



12. Can you think of a time when a trial became a temptation to sin because you responded wrongly? What did you learn from that experience?

13. What are some trials or temptations currently impacting your life that you could use God's leading and deliverance?

Deliver (**rhuomai**) means to draw or snatch to oneself and refers to a snatching from danger, evil or an enemy. This basic idea of rescuing from danger is pictured by the use describing a soldier's going to a wounded comrade on the battlefield and carrying him to safety - he runs to the cry of his comrade to rescue him from the hands of the enemy. Deliver (**rhuomai**) emphasizes greatness of peril from which deliverance is given by a mighty act of power.

14. List some things that would happen if God withdrew His protection from us. If those things are true, then what keeps us from greater spiritual dependence upon His protection?

How would your life look different as a result of becoming more dependent on Christ's protection?

15. When have you seen the Lord deliver you from evil? What lessons did you learn from your experience?

16. How do you need to change the way that you pray in response to the framework for Christian prayer outlined in the Lord's Prayer?

Leaders:

Allow extra time this week for a prolonged time of prayer. Instead of focusing on regular weekly requests, use this time after the lesson to pray through some of the truths that we have learned in our study this week.

Spend time in prayer:

1. Thanking God for some of the daily bread that you have received today.

2. Asking God to meet some of your needs for the day to come.

3. Crying out to God about your absolute need for His provision each day.

4. Seek God's direction and ways so that you may be "delivered from evil."

¹ R.C. Sproul, Deliver Us from Evil. *From Ligonier Ministries*, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: www.ligonier.org

² JC Ryle, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew.

³ JR Miller, Shrinking from Temptation.

week #22



Forgive Us Our Trespases

The Greek term for “forgiveness” (*aphiemi*) comes from a word that means “to let go.” Forgiveness is a release, a letting go of self-destructive feelings like anger, bitterness, and revenge.

Study

Open It

Read It

Get It

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (vv. 14-15) Matthew 6:9-15

Forgive Us Our Trespases

by Philip Ryke

We need daily pardon and daily protection as well as daily provision. So after Jesus taught us to pray, “give us today our daily bread,” He also taught us to pray, “and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:12–13). These petitions are for fallen sinners — for people who are often tempted to sin, and sometimes give in. Even before we face these temptations, we should ask God to keep us safe from what John Calvin called in his *Institutes* “the violent

assaults of Satan.” In asking not to be led into temptation, we are not requesting that we will never be tempted at all, but that when we are tempted God will deliver us from Satan’s deadly attacks.

But what about the times when we do sin and fall into spiritual debt? How should we pray then? The first thing to do when we fall into debt is to figure out how much we owe. So what debt do we owe to God because of our sin? We are guilty for what we have done and for what we have left undone, for sins of omission as well as commission. Our debt includes secret sins as well as public ones, deliberate sins as well as

sins committed in relative ignorance. And when all our sins are added together, they place us in God’s eternal debt.

Yet Jesus has taught us to ask our Father to help us. “Our Father,” we are to pray, “forgive us our debts.” With these words we declare our moral bankruptcy, freely admitting that we owe God more than everything we have. Then we ask Him to forgive us outright. And because He is our loving Father, God does what we ask. When we go to Him weighed down with the debt of all our sin, He does not sit down with us to work out a payment plan. Instead, He offers full

and free forgiveness. When God remits our debts He is well within His legal rights, for the Scripture says that He took our sin away, “canceling the record of debt that stood against us” by “nailing it to the cross” (Col. 2:14). This vivid image corresponds to the way debts were sometimes cancelled in the ancient world. When a debtor finally paid off all his debts, his creditor would strike a nail through the certificate of debt. In the same way, when Christ died on the cross, God drove a nail right through the infinite debt of our sin. There are no longer any outstanding charges against us.

The debts we ask God to forgive when we pray the way Jesus taught us to pray are the very debts that were crucified with Christ at Calvary. When Christ died on the cross, all our debts were cancelled. The Greek word for “cancel” (*exaleipho*), which Paul uses in Colossians 2, means “to blot out” or “to wipe away.” It means that the mountain of debt we once owed to God because of our sin has been completely erased. There are still some things we owe to God, however — not out of debt, but out of gratitude — and one of those things is forgiveness. “Forgive us our debts,” Jesus taught us to pray, “as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. 6:12). From this petition we learn that we are not the only ones in debt. We have debtors of our own, people who owe us something for what they have done to us. And we are called to forgive them.

This is a hard teaching. The prayer for forgiveness is the only petition in the Lord’s Prayer that comes with a condition attached. If we do not forgive, we will not be forgiven. Yet we find it hard to forgive. How, then, can we be forgiven? To illustrate the difficulty, consider something John Wesley said in his missionary days when he was having a difficult time with General Oglethorpe, the proud and pitiless

founder of colonial Georgia. Oglethorpe made this startling comment: “I never forgive.” “Then I hope, sir,” replied Wesley, “you never sin.” Wesley was thinking of the Lord’s Prayer, which implies that the unforgiving are unforgiven.

Asking for our own forgiveness takes priority over offering it to others. If we had to forgive before we could be forgiven, then forgiveness would become a work, something we had to do to be saved. Yet salvation comes by grace alone. We cannot work off our debts, we can only ask for them to be canceled. But now, having been forgiven, by the grace of God we are also able to forgive. Indeed, our ability to forgive is one of the surest signs of our having been forgiven. Those who are truly forgiven, truly forgive. Giving such forgiveness can be very costly, and the more someone has hurt us, the harder it is to forgive. Yet forgiveness also brings great joy, not only to the forgiven, but especially to the forgiver. The Greek term for “forgiveness” (*aphiemi*) comes from a word that means “to let go.” Forgiveness is a release, a letting go of self-destructive feelings like anger, bitterness, and revenge.

Richard Wurmbrand once met a man who had experienced the divine release that comes through forgiveness. Wurmbrand was in a Communist prison in Romania at the time, lying in a prison cell reserved for those who were dying. In the cot on his right was a pastor who had been beaten so badly that he was about to die. On his left was the very man who had beaten him, a Communist who was later betrayed and tortured by his comrades.

One night the Communist awakened in the middle of a nightmare and cried out, “Please, pastor, say a prayer for me. I have committed such crimes, I cannot die.” The

pastor feebly got up, stumbled past Wurmbrand's cot, and sat at the bedside of his enemy. As he watched, Wurmbrand saw the pastor caress the hair of the man who had tortured him and speak these amazing words: "I have forgiven you with all of my heart, and I love you. If I who am only a sinner can love and forgive you, more so can Jesus who is the Son of God and who is love incarnate. Return to Him. He longs for you much more than you long for Him. He wishes to forgive you much more than you wish to be forgiven. You just repent." There, in the prison cell, the Communist began to confess all his murders and tortures. When he had finished, the two men prayed together, embraced, and then returned to their beds, where each died that very night.

The Romanian pastor had learned how to forgive. He had learned this from Jesus, who first forgave his debts, and then taught him to forgive his debtors. This same Jesus forgives us and delivers us, for by His death on the cross He has canceled our debt and destroyed the power of the Devil.

Open It!

1. Share about a time you experienced the powerful release of forgiving someone. How did you feel?

2. What types of offenses seem to be most difficult for you to forgive? Why?

Read It | Matthew 6:9-15

Read the entire passage before proceeding.



(Continued)

Get It

This part of the Lord's Prayer deserves especially to be remembered. It condemns all self-righteousness and self-justifying. We are instructed here to keep up a continual habit of confession at the throne of grace, and a continual habit of seeking mercy and remission. Let this never be forgotten. We need daily to wash our feet (John 13:10). Its object is to remind us that we must not expect our prayers for forgiveness to be heard if we pray with malice and spite in our hearts towards others. To pray in such a frame of mind is mere formality and hypocrisy. It is even worse than hypocrisy: it is as much as saying, "Do not forgive me at all." Our prayers are nothing without love. We must not expect to be forgiven if we cannot forgive².

1. Matthew 6:12 says "forgive us our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors." What is the significance of both being forgiven and being forgiving?

Why does Jesus make this aspect of His prayer a package deal?

2. When you pray "forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors," what are you really praying?
3. The Greek word for "forgive" has the meaning of being freed, "cut loose" or of literally having a debt erased. Do you seek God for that kind of daily forgiveness? Why or why not?
4. In Greek the word "as" is a comparative participle. It carries the meaning of "just like," or "in the same way." How do these definitions impact your understanding of this verse?

And When You Pray

Ray Pritchard

Jesus is telling us that there is a vital link between the way you treat other people and the way God in heaven is going to treat you. Let's face it, we don't like that. On one level we tend to think it would be good if we could hate someone for what they did to us and still have the blessings of God, still be filled with the Spirit, still walk in joy every day, still radiate the love of Jesus, and still have our prayers answered. We'd much prefer if we could just have our relationship with God insulated and encapsulated so we could treat other people any way we like. Jesus says, "No deal. You can't have it that way." Unless you forgive you will not be forgiven. This is a hard word, isn't it? But it is a hard word of grace.

Debt (opheilema) is that which is owed or obligations we have incurred, including sins of omission and commission. Sins are moral and spiritual debts to God that must be paid. In his account of this prayer, Matthew probably used debts because it corresponded to the most common Aramaic term (hoba) for sin used by Jews of that day, which also represented moral or spiritual debt to God. In this petition disciples ask God's forgiveness for their failure to live according to His will.

5. What are some of the "debts" for which you need forgiveness?
6. Do you agree that even though we are justified by grace, Christians still need to pray for daily forgiveness from the Lord? Explain your answer.
7. Read Matthew 18:21-35. Which comes first — God's forgiving us or our forgiving others? Why is the order crucial in properly understanding this petition?
8. Paul says in Colossians 3:13 "forgive as the Lord forgave you." Write down some truths about how the Lord forgave you and what it cost Him.

How does this color your thinking about forgiveness you might extend to someone else?

for·give·ness

fər'givnəs/

9. Is it possible for a person without Christ in their life to forgive another? Why or why not?

How does being a Christian make the forgiveness process different?

10. Why does forgiveness seem illogical from a human perspective?

11. Why is it so hard to forgive others? What things stand in our way in offering forgiveness?

12. It has been said that failing to forgive someone is like setting yourself on fire and hoping the smoke bothers them. What are some of the negative side effects of continuing to be unforgiving?

13. Is there someone you need to forgive? If so, write their name and their debt to you. Resolve to forgive them in your heart, through prayer, and to reconcile with them, if that is possible.

Prayer

leaders

Allow for some extra time this week for a prolonged period of prayer. Instead of focusing this week on regular requests, use this time after the lesson to pray through some of the truths that we have learned in our study this week.



spend time in prayer...

- Quietly confessing your debts/sins to God as well as seeking His forgiveness.
- As a group thanking God for His forgiveness, remembering the cost of your forgiveness.
- Asking God to grow in you a heart of forgiveness and mercy to those who have wronged you.

¹ R.C. Sproul, *Forgive Us Our Trespasses From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: www.ligonier.org*

² JC Ryle [Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew.](#)