

Learning from Jesus How to Pray (Matt. 6:9–13)
Rhythms of Renewal
Zionsville Fellowship | January 18, 2026 | Drew Hunter

We're in our final week of our *Rhythms of Renewal* series, and then we'll return to Proverbs.

This morning we're focusing on prayer. Some of you have cultivated a good prayer life. Others of you have often tried and failed. Others of you may honestly say that you feel too busy, distracted, or lazy to pray much. Or you feel like you aren't sure if you're praying for the right things. Or you aren't sure how stay focused in prayer. Or you're not sure if God even hears you.

This is why it is such a privilege and gift that Jesus actually taught us how to pray. This is what the Lord's Prayer is. It's one of the most well-known texts in the Bible. Many people know it and use it. I recently watched the 1991 NBA finals, which was the bulls first championship. And after they won, they went right to the locker room, huddled up, and recited the Lord's Prayer.

We may know this prayer. But we often miss just how much of a gift this prayer is to us. If we receive what Jesus teaches us here, it will transform our prayer life.

This is called the Lord's Prayer not because he prayed it, but because he gave it to us to pray. It is the prayer *from* the Lord. It is his gift to us.

So the point of this message is the point of Jesus in giving us this prayer: **Receive the Lord's Prayer as a pattern for your prayers.**

Many people expect a pastor to inspire people to pray by giving some kind of fresh, emotionally-exciting secret. "Breakthrough prayers." "Unlocking the power of heaven, right now!" But the Lord's Prayer is Jesus himself teaching us to pray.

My hope is simply that we would receive this as a framework for our own prayers. Our purpose is to regularly pray how Jesus taught us to pray.

So, we'll read through this prayer in Matthew 6, then move through it phrase by phrase.

- 9 Pray then like this: "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 this day 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 evil.

We'll walk through this phrase by phrase. We'll first look at that opening statement where Jesus says to "pray then like this." Then we'll walk through each of the six requests so that we can use them in our own prayers.

Pray Then Like This: Our Father in Heaven

We'll look at the six requests soon.

But first, even the way Jesus opened this is filled with insight for us. This begins, "pray then like this, 'Our Father in heaven.'" Before the six requests, here are seven insights about prayer from these opening words.

First, the gift of prayer.

The very fact that we have this paragraph in front of us is a privilege. Even people who don't trust and follow Jesus acknowledge his character and wisdom. He is the greatest teacher who ever lived—he was brilliant. And is not just a human; he has always been the divine Son, in perfect communion with the Father. No one ever had a better prayer life than him. And here he teaches us to pray to the Father.

There are lots of books on how to pray. There are lots of spiritual gurus and teachers. There are many tips and tricks. And many of these teachers just make stuff up. But here is Jesus himself—giving us clear, simple instruction.

If you want to know how to pray, this is it. If you aren't sure what to say in prayer, this is it.

Second, the importance of prayer.

This text is part of the most famous sermon ever preached—the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon was very carefully crafted. It's not just a random assortment of teaching. Jesus clearly organized it. And do you know where the Lord's Prayer sits in the Sermon? At the exact center. The structure of the sermon on the mount is like a mountain—it ascends to this middle point, and then descends from there. This is the highest point, where heaven and earth meet. And it is the place of prayer.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is giving his vision for life in his kingdom. He is giving an overview of how to live as a true human. He is showing us what a life looks like when we have a new heart, and we follow Christ. And at the heart of it is prayer.

The world needs to know what it means to be a true human, and Jesus tells us. And at the heart of it is knowing the God who made us—and talking to him in prayer.

Third, the simplicity of prayer.

Jesus's instruction is not complicated. There is nothing about how to sit or stand or kneel. There is nothing about setting a particular time of day, or how often to pray. And this is also not very long. He gives very clear, straightforward instruction that anyone can do.

Maybe you are 13 years old, and you have just started to trust Christ. You aren't sure how to pray. You hear other people pray, and it seems complicated or advanced. But it doesn't have to be. Jesus gives us a very clear, simple pattern to follow. You can use this in the morning or evening, or during the day.

Fourth, the community of prayer.

Of course, we can and should pray individually by ourselves. But when Jesus gives us these words for prayer, he does not say, "My father in heaven, give me this day my daily bread." He says to pray, "*Our* Father in heaven, *give us* this day *our* daily bread."

When you pray this prayer, you can know other Christians around the world pray it as well. We're joining together, lifting these requests to God. And as we pray this prayer, we should not just pray for ourselves—but pray for one another.

Fifth, the sincerity of prayer.

Jesus gives this instruction in contrast to insincere prayer. Just before this he said who we should *not* pray like. He pointed out the hypocritical religious leaders who just pray to be seen. And he also pointed out those who heap up repeated and empty words. Plenty of people make up prayers and use them like magic. Today this would be all the books and youtube channels that talk about manifesting things through meditation.

Jesus is saying, don't pray like that. Don't pray for the sake of being seen by others. Don't pray to try to manipulate God. Just go to God sincerely—and pray this simple way.

Sixth, the grace of prayer.

Before giving requests, he says how to address God. He says to pray, "Our Father in heaven." This was radical when Jesus said it. People did not address God as their Father in prayer. But Jesus did, and he invited his people to join him. Jesus is sharing with us something of his relationship with the Father.

He is inviting sinful people like us to come before the holy God as his loved children. This is the surprise of the gospel message at the heart of Christianity. Every single time we pray, we should remember this from the outset. We should never just breeze past the opening, flippantly saying, "heavenly father..." and moving on. No, let this always be a moment of worship and awe in light of God's grace.

Martin Luther said the “our” in “Our Father” is the hardest word in Scripture to truly understand and believe. He said we think we understand the Bible, but we really don’t—not fully. Here’s what he said while sitting around the table at his home in 1531. He often had students and guests over, and they would record his conversation.

He said, “Even though I am a so-called great doctor, I have still not mastered the teachings at a child’s level, such as the Ten Commandments, the Profession of Faith, and the Lord’s Prayer, rather I am still learning them, and I pray them daily with my little Hans and my little Lena.

Who understands even the first line, ‘Our Father who is in heaven,’ in its deepest meaning? If I understand correctly these words as part of my faith, that God, who holds heaven and earth in His hands, is my father, then it would naturally follow that I am also lord over heaven and earth, Christ is my brother, and everything is also mine; Gabriel is my servant and Raphael my coachman, and all the angels are at my service to provide whatever I desire, the spirits are sent to protect me by my father so that I will not stumble over a stone, and so on.

But... let my father take hold of me and throw me into a dungeon... then we shall see whether these words have been understood correctly. Our faith is weak, and our weakness lets us think, yes, who knows whether it is true?

This is the reason that this one word in all Scripture is the most difficult of all: ‘our.’”ⁱ

Jesus gave us this word as the hardest word to believe because it is the most gracious. And every time we address God in prayer as our Father, we claim this by faith. We remember that we deserve him to be our enemy... but Jesus died to reconcile us and bring us into the family. God is now our Father, and he welcomes us in prayer. This is the grace of prayer.

The seventh and last insight is this: the framework of prayer.

Jesus is not giving a quick prayer to recite without thinking. He is giving a pattern for prayer.

Luther also helps us here. One time his barber named Peter wrote to ask how to pray. Luther wrote him back. You can find it online—it’s called a simple way to pray. And Luther’s insight is that Jesus is giving us a simple framework or pattern for prayer.

So, he explains how he uses the Lord’s prayer every day. He prays through it by reciting it once through. And then he goes back and uses each request as a topic. Each request is a general category—and so he will go back and say, “Hallowed be your name.” And then he’ll pray all sorts of things that come to mind related to that. And then he’ll say again, “your kingdom come,” and pray all sorts of things related to that.

I think that's the kind of thing Jesus had in mind. Jesus gave us six priorities or topics of prayer. They are simple, but comprehensive. So my hope is that we would not receive this as just an option for prayer—but that we would actually pray this prayer regularly.

The last couple Sundays we handed out a card with this prayer on it. On one side is a daily prayer written by John Stott. On the other is the Lord's Prayer. You can get a copy at the Resource Center. You can keep it in your Bible and use it every day.

But in order to use this as a framework, you have to actually understand what these requests mean. So let's now briefly walk through the six requests.

Request 1: Hallowed Be Your Name

The first request is “hallowed be your name.”

This may be the most misunderstood request. Why?

One reason is because we may not recognize that this *is* a request. It's a prayer request that God's name would be hallowed. This is not a statement of adoration or praise. It is not saying, “hallowed *is* your name,” but requesting that God's name would *be* hallowed.

Now, what does that mean? God's name is a way of referring to his identity—someone's name is their reputation, or a statement of who they are. And the word “hallowed” is an archaic way of saying, “regarded as holy.” We could translate this first line, “May your name be sanctified, or regarded as holy, or honored.” It is a prayer that God would cause people to honor him for who he is.

So, this is not itself adoration; but it is a prayer that God would create adoration in the world. It is a prayer that people across the world would know and honor him.

The most helpful thing for me in understanding this came from seeing its background.

Jesus seems to be intentionally drawing on the Old Testament prophecy of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel, the people of Israel had been sent into exile and scattered among the nations. When they had lived in the land of Israel, they dishonored God. They did not trust and love and obey him. So he sent them out of the land into exile among the nations.

And then he spoke to them through the prophet Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 36 he said that one day he will forgive his people. He will restore them to himself. And he will give them new hearts so they actually love and obey him. This is the promise of the New Covenant.

But listen to his primary concern in all of this in Ezekiel 36. God said he scattered them among the nations... “20 But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land.’ 21 But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came.”

So God’s name was dishonored among the nations. God’s reputation was diminished in the world because of the way his people lived. And so God promised that one day he would make his name hallowed.

Ezekiel 26:22 says: “Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. 23 And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them.

And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. 24 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. 25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

This is the promise of the New Covenant—and Jesus came to fulfill it. He came to bring full forgiveness and to create a people who have new hearts. In the sermon on the Mount, he said that his people would be a light to the world—that people would see their good works and glorify God. This is totally different than the Old Testament. People saw Israel’s bad works and they dishonored God. But Jesus created the church, by the Spirit, as a people who actually know and obey God—not perfectly, but truly. And it is God’s work in our lives for the sake of his own name. It is that his name would be hallowed in the world.

God’s name is hallowed as the church grows deeper and broader in the world. As more people enter this New Covenant community through faith and baptism. And then one day Jesus will return, and every knee will bow, and every mouth will honor him.

So, very practically, how do we pray this request?

- It means we pray for the gospel to spread to more people. We pray for our friends, our children, our parents, our neighbors, our coworkers, our nation. We pray for the gospel to spread to the least reached nations. We pray this so that God’s name would be honored.

- It means we pray for God’s reputation to be honored in our own lives. We pray that he would help us live in a way that shines as light and honors God. That we would not live in a way that causes people to reject God.
- It means that we pray for those who would dishonor God’s name to be restrained. We pray for false religions and false teaching to be resisted. We pray for Islam and modern paganism and atheism to stop spreading—and for the good news of Jesus’s grace to spread.

Request 2: Your Kingdom Come

The second request is “your kingdom come.”

What is God’s kingdom? The kingdom of God refers to his rule and reign over his people. The Old Testament unfolds the promise of God’s kingdom from the beginning. All through the Old Testament, we learn of the promise of a coming king—the Messiah, or Christ, who will come to rule over Israel and the nations.

And then when Jesus came, he said, “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.” Jesus brought the kingdom in his own life and ministry—and it has progressively come ever since then. So, Jesus established his kingdom in his first coming. When he was resurrected, he said all authority has been given to him. And when he ascended to heaven, he was enthroned as the king. And now as the gospel spreads and people trust and follow him, they come under his rule. And we wait for him to return to fully establish his kingdom.

So, we refer to his kingdom as an “already and not yet” reality. It is as if when Jesus came the sunrise of his kingdom began, and now the sun is rising, and when he returns it will be the full heat of day.

So, how do we pray in light of this?

We pray that the sunrise of his kingdom would keep spreading its light and warmth.

Here’s how the Heidelberg Catechism helps us pray for his kingdom to come. Listen for how it leads us to pray for ourselves, for the spread of the kingdom, and then for its ultimate coming when Jesus returns: “Rule us by your word and Spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to you. Keep your church strong, and add to it. Destroy the devil’s work; destroy every force which revolts against you and every conspiracy against your word. Do this until your kingdom is so complete and perfect that in it you are all in all.”ⁱⁱ

Request 3: Your Will Be Done, on Earth as It Is in Heaven

The third request is related to the first two: “your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

How do we pray for his will to be done? The Bible speaks of God's will in two ways.

- The first is God's sovereign will, or will of decree. This is his plan that is always accomplished. God is sovereign over all things and he plans the end from the beginning. Nothing can prevent his will from being done.
- The second way the Bible talks about God's will is in view here: It is God's moral will, his revealed will, his will of command. This is the will that is perfectly done in heaven by the angels, but is not carried out on earth by humans.

God's moral will is that we would love him above all things and love our neighbor as ourselves—and we often fail to do that. So this is a prayer that God would transform us to follow his moral will and commands.

So, what does this mean to pray this practically?

Think about how to pray this for yourself, for our church, and for the world.

- We pray for God's moral will to be done in our own lives. We pray for God to transform us so that we fulfill the Sermon on the Mount. That he would transform our hearts by the Spirit so that we bear the fruit of the Spirit.
- It means we pray for God's moral will to be done in our church and among the members. We pray for one another that we would have a culture of peace and unity and love—and not neglect and gossip and selfishness.
- It means we pray for the gospel to spread in the world—to our neighbors and the nations. We pray for churches to be planted. We pray for people to respond to the gospel. And we pray for the culture and society and government to reflect God's morality.

Request 4: Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

The first three requests are focused directly on God's name, God's kingdom, and God's will. Now the next three are focused on our needs—our need for food, for forgiveness, and for spiritual protection.

So, request four is, "give us this day our daily bread."

Bread represents food and our basic necessities. Even though you may have a refrigerator and pantry full of food—we still pray for God to provide every day. We depend on him for all of this. He is ultimately the one who uses various means to provide for our needs.

And the fact that we pray not for “my daily bread,” but “our daily bread” means this is communal. We pray for one another. We pray that God would provide for our brothers and sisters in Christ as well.

And this category of prayer would include prayer for everything needed to keep us alive. It is prayer for those who grow and produce the food. It is prayer for a good economy so we can afford food. It is prayer for good practices so that our food isn't toxic and contaminated. It is prayer for a wise government that allows for a market to provide food efficiently.

Request 5: And Forgive Us Our Debts, as We Also Have Forgiven Our Debtors

The fifth request is for forgiveness: “and forgiven us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

Jesus uses a financial metaphor to describe our sin. This gives us an insight into the nature of sin. Our sins against God put us in a debt. We owe him our obedience, but we rebel against him and go in debt. And we cannot repay this by our works. We have no way to repay this on our own.

So Jesus leads us to pray for God to forgive our debts—to wipe out what we owe him.

And Jesus gave us this prayer knowing that he came to make this possible. He is the one who came as the sacrifice who would pay our debt. I remember this is the image that helped me grasp the gospel for the first time when I was about 12 years old. We sang a song in our church that referred to Jesus paying our debt. And that helped me understand that he died for my sins so that I could be forgiven. He took my judgment on the cross, he gave his own life as the payment for my sin. Maybe you have not yet trusted Christ. You need to see that your sin put you in debt—and you cannot pay. But Jesus paid it all for all who trust him—so you can receive his payment.

And the fact that Jesus teaches us to pray this means that we need ongoing forgiveness.

Jesus implies that we will have ongoing sin. When you become a Christian, you don't stop sinning altogether. And so you never move beyond the need for God's grace and forgiveness. We should regularly be confessing our sins and receiving fresh forgiveness.

This doesn't mean that we lose our salvation when we sin and we have to be re-saved. This prayer assumes that we have been accepted and forgiven once-for-all, and that God is now our Father. But we still do sin, and so we need this relational forgiveness and restoration.

Jesus adds that we ask God to forgive us, “as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

He is signaling the reality that those who are forgiven by God are those who forgive others. If you have received God's forgiveness for your sins, you will not be the kind of person who refuses to forgive others. God's forgiveness changes us, it make us people who are gracious. If you are unwilling to forgive someone their sin against you, it proves that you don't really know God's forgiveness for your sin. How can you not forgive someone's smaller sin against you when God forgive your greater sin against him? To ask for forgiveness from God while being unwilling to forgive those who ask forgiveness to you is hypocrisy.ⁱⁱⁱ

Request 6: And Lead Us Not Into Temptation, but Deliver Us from Evil

The final request is "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

The word temptation can refer either to temptation to sin, or it can mean "testing." That's probably what's in view here: We ask God to not lead us into a time of hard testing, where we may be tempted to sin. God himself doesn't tempt us, but he can lead us into a test where our own sinful nature or satan can tempt us. And so we pray to avoid that. We pray, instead, to be delivered from evil—or delivered from the evil one.

So, how do we pray this final request? How do we use this as a category for prayer?

It means we pray for God to keep us from situations where we will be tempted. It means we ask for help to resist temptation. It means we ask for the Spirit to transform us to pursue holiness rather than sin.

And it means that we pray for others this way as well—pray for your friends, family, and church members to resist sin. To resist temptation to anger, or lust, or gossip, or greed, and so forth. It means you know the particular temptations of a few people, and you pray for them in light of it.

Conclusion

Jesus gives us the privilege of prayer, and six priorities. Here are three main implications as we go.

First, let's actually us this prayer in our lives.

Jesus himself taught us to pray like this. He gave this to us as a framework. If you don't know what to pray for, this is the answer. If you are distracted in prayer, use this framework. If you doubt God cares, listen to Jesus saying to call him your Father.

Second, let's use this prayer together.

Pray in light of this whenever you pray with others. Pray with your family at the beginning and end of the day—and use these requests. Pray these priorities when you pray in your small group—you don't need to tell anyone you're going to do it. When it's your turn to pray, pick one or two of these requests and pray in light of them. When you lead in prayer during the service, you can use this as a framework.

And finally, remember the one who taught us to pray here.

Jesus is the one who was most aligned to this prayer in his own heart and life. These priorities marked his life—he was devoted to the honor of his Father's name, he came to bring the kingdom, and he submitted to the Father's will by going to the cross. He did not need to pray for forgiveness; but he died so that we could have it. He is the reason we can pray to God as our gracious Father. So let's receive and use the Lord's Prayer as a gift.

ⁱ Martin Luther, in *Off the Record with Martin Luther*, 393–394.

ⁱⁱ Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 48.

ⁱⁱⁱ See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* in NICNT, 250.