

# "Pray Then Like This"

*Psalm 121:1-8; Matthew 6:9-15*

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Dear Congregation of Christ: Last Thursday, the National Day of Prayer was commemorated at the White House. In 1775, even before the Declaration of Independence, the Second Continental Congress established national days of prayer. In the 1800s, various other national days, including Thanksgiving, were established. Finally, in 1952, the National Day of Prayer was officially declared on any appropriate date of choice. It was only in 1988 that every first Thursday of May became its official day.

Prayers – including the Lord's Prayer – and Bible study were also a regular practice in colonial schools until well into the 19th century. But because of the immigration of non-Protestant people from the "Christian" West, these practices declined. Finally, in 1962, judging on the case brought by three Jews and two others in New York, the Supreme Court banned all Christian prayers in schools. So prayers to "Almighty God" were banned and replaced by prayers to a generic god, or by silly "moments of silence."

Concerning prayer, our nation is all too inconsistent. Prayer in schools are banned. The Ten Commandments are banned from many public buildings. But almost all politicians end their campaign speeches with "God bless America." The Senate and House of Representatives both open their sessions with a prayer, whatever prayer that would be. Most state and local government meetings do so as well. And whenever there is a mass shooting, many politicians and celebrities, most of them unbelievers, send their condolences with, "Our thoughts and prayers are with you." For example, after the Las Vegas shooting last year, Nancy Pelosi, an unbeliever, said, "Praying for those lost, wounded & waiting for news from loved ones."

To whom then are these unbelievers praying? Obviously, they pray to whatever God they worship: Allah, Hare Krishna, Buddha, the gods of cults, and any other pagan gods. America started on Christian foundations, but it has now become the *New Samaria*. Why? After the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel called Samaria, they exiled the Jews to different nations of the empire. With intermarriage, the Jews also started worshiping pagan gods – in addition to Israel's God Yahweh. So we read in 2 Kings 17:33, "*So they feared the LORD but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away.*" The state of religion is exactly like that of these Samaritans.

But the Bible tells us that the only God that man is to pray to is the God of heaven, Yahweh, the one God in Three Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Deu 6:4; 2 Cor 13:14). For all this display of religious piety, the Lord's Prayer has practically disappeared from public life. And it has disappeared from almost all churches.

Our text this morning is the pattern of prayer that our Lord Jesus Christ taught his disciples and all Christians through the ages. We will briefly study this pattern and content of the Lord's Prayer under four headings: first, **Invocation**; second, **Three God-Centered Petitions**; third, **Three Personal Petitions**; and fourth, **Doxology**.

## Invocation

In our study this morning, I will use the King James Version of the Lord's Prayer. Why? Most of us are more comfortable with the "old-fashioned" and time-honored version with the "thys," "thines" and "arts." The prayer begins with, *"Our Father, who art in heaven."*

Prayer must begin with an address, an invocation, to our Father in heaven. In our worship service, we begin with an invocation, an acknowledgement of who we worship: the Lord God who made heaven and earth (Psa 121:1-2). No other God created the universe out of nothing. We call upon the name of the God our Creator, Christ our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit who mediates for us. We seek God's blessing, as we seek to worship him in Spirit and truth.

A common error by both Christians and non-Christians is that all human beings are children of God who is the Father of all mankind. Yes, this is true in the broadest sense because he is the Creator of all. But Christians are not universalists, because only those who receive Christ by faith alone have the right to be called children of God, as John 1:12 says. Paul affirms this, *"for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith"* (Gal 3:26). Because he has adopted us his own children, he provides all good things for body and soul. So we can cry out to him in the most intimate Father-child relationship, *"Abba, Father!"* (Gal 4:5).

Therefore, Matthew 7:11 says that our heavenly Father is infinitely better than our earthly father, *"how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"* So in our prayers, we begin with invoking the name of the only God, the only true God who is our Creator, our Redeemer, and the Giver of all good gifts. We are to praise and thank him for these benefits before we launch our petitions to him.

## Three God-Centered Petitions

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we think of petitions only when we come to these requests, *"Give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our debts, and lead us not into temptation."* But before these personal petitions are three God-centered petitions: (1) *"hallowed be thy name"*; (2) *"thy kingdom come"*; and (3) *"thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."* These first three petitions are requests that God do three things *for himself*: to act for his own name's sake, to advance his kingdom, and to make his will be known and obeyed on earth.

**The first petition is, "Hallowed by thy name."** Almost all modern translations kept the old word "hallowed." What does "hallowing" God's name mean? It means "to treat as holy" or "to reverence" God's name. All throughout the Bible, believers and pagans are commanded to fear, revere and worship God's name. The Third Commandment is about his name, *"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain"* (Exo 20:7). This command is ignored by pagans who blaspheme God's name as a swear word every time they speak.

But so-called churches and Christians are not far behind. Liberal Presbyterians says it is also good to call the Trinity "Rock, Redeemer and Friend," "Mother, Child and Womb," "Rainbow, Ark, and Dove," or "Sun, Light and Burning Ray"! We often hear people refer to God as "the Man upstairs," "Buddy," "Bro," "the Big Guy," or "the Big Kahuna." They approve popular teen sayings such as "Jesus Rocks" or "God is Rad." When God is called these names, he is not the God the Bible, but a pagan god.

**The second petition is “Thy kingdom come.”** This does not mean that the kingdom of God has not come yet, because when Jesus first came, he declared, *“The kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Mark 1:15). He also said to the Pharisees, *“The kingdom of God is in the midst of you”* (Luke 17:21). God is sovereign over all his creation from beginning to end. We are not praying that God extend his control over all things, for he is in total control over all things, people, and events (Eph 1:11).

But we also pray that the reign of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17) will come to the world. For we know that until our Lord Jesus Christ returns from heaven, the unbelieving world will resist God’s kingdom as it exists in this age in his Church. But while waiting, we are to pray that our hearts will be submissive to God’s rule and authority. It is only when Christ returns that the kingdom of God would finally come in its completion and perfection.

**In the third petition, we pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** If God is Almighty, then why is his will not done on earth? Yes, God is Almighty, but he leaves unbelieving, unrepentant people to their own will that is enslaved by sin. They will never do God’s will because God passes them by as he gives his grace and mercy to his chosen people.

But God has his hidden decrees which he foreordained from eternity past before the creation of the world. These decrees will always be fulfilled and completed. He has ordained all things, good and bad, to come to pass in order that his decrees will be fulfilled (Isa 46:10). No one and nothing will be able to resist their fulfillment. The whole history of the earth and all its inhabitants are under God’s sovereign will. This hidden will is only revealed after the event or deed is done. When we were single, we did not know if we were going to get married, or who we will marry, or if we will have children. No one knows the day of one’s birth before he is born, or his death before he dies. God’s will in these things is hidden, but according to Ephesians 1:11, we have *“been predestined according to the purpose of him”* and God *“works all things according to the counsel of his will.”*

Only after we have prayed these first three petitions for God to act on his own behalf that we pray the next three petitions for our personal needs.

### **Three Personal Petitions**

The next three petitions concern things that are more well-known to Christians. These are what we usually think of as petitions or supplications or requests. We ask God to act on our behalf.

**In the fourth petition, “Give us this day our daily bread,”** we ask for our most basic provisions in this world: food, shelter, clothing, and all things necessary for existence in this world. Though our Lord is concerned chiefly about our soul, he is also deeply concerned about our bodily needs. But we also pray for our daily provisions so that when we receive them, we may give thanks to God as the only fountain of all good (Jas 1:17). Then when he fulfills his promises, we will cease trusting in others and place it in God alone. Therefore, when we are in dire straits, we can confidently say, *“The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”* (Heb 13:6).

The last two petitions concern our soul’s needs. **The fifth petition, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” is most important.** Without the forgiveness of sins, there is no salvation, no hope in this world and in the next. How are we forgiven of our sins? Only when we

believe and trust in Christ alone who willingly offered his own shed blood and broken body on the cross for all our sins. We are able to repent and ask forgiveness from God always when we sin, because we continue to sin daily until our Lord takes us to heaven. And because of the infinite value of God's forgiveness in Christ toward us, we also pray that we will also heartily forgive those who sin against us. This is why our Lord, after teaching this prayer, commands us to forgive others, as God has forgiven us (Matt 6:14-15).

**In the sixth and last petition, we pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."** When we pray this petition, we are acknowledging to God that we are helpless in resisting temptations by the Evil One, the Devil. Our enemy blocks our spiritual pilgrimage with *"the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life"* (1 John 2:16). We are asking our Lord to preserve and strengthen us against these sinful things by the work of the Spirit of holiness in our hearts.

God does not tempt anyone (Jas 1:13), but he often leads us into temptation by allowing the devil to tempt us. He does this to test and strengthen our faith. Recently, there was another controversial statement by Pope Benedict when he said that this petition should be translated as "Do not let us fall into temptation." This translation runs counter to Matthew 4:1 which says, *"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."* Our Lord himself was led by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil! But Jesus also commands us to pray that we *"may not enter into temptation"* (Matt 26:41). But when we are tempted, God promises that he himself will provide a way of escape so we may endure the temptation (1 Cor 10:13). God assures us that he will answer our petition for help in fleeing from temptation.

These then are the six petitions we pray whenever we pray the Lord's Prayer. And these are the same petitions we pray for in our daily life as citizens of God's kingdom.

## Doxology

And when we have prayed so, we are to praise, glorify and thank God for his promise to answer them, even before they are done.

This is why the Lord's Prayer ends in a doxology, *"For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen."* Doxology" simply means "a word of glory." Since this ending is not found in the oldest Greek manuscripts, no translation includes this except for the King James Version. But this ending is found in 1 Chronicles 29:11, *"Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty . . . Yours is the kingdom, O LORD."* So it is a valid addition, because it is a reference to a Biblical text.

**D**ear Friends: If you haven't yet memorized the Lord's Prayer, you must, because it is the Christian's fundamental prayer. Its beginning gives honor to our God as our Creator and Redeemer. Its ending glorifies and praises God because he is the Almighty, Glorious Sovereign King of his kingdom. When we pray the first three petitions, we ask God to act on behalf of his own holy name. And when we pray the next three petitions, we ask God to act on our behalf: our needs for body and, most importantly, our soul.

As our Mediator and Great High Priest in heaven our Lord Jesus Christ sends this prayer on our behalf to our Father in heaven, today and always. Amen.