Deeper Discoveries
Sermon on the Mount
Lesson 11: Matthew 6:9–15

Literary Design

The Lord's Prayer is highly structured and poetic in ways translation cannot capture. The first five lines, focused on our Father in heaven, each have nine syllables, as they would be spoken naturally in Greek. The last five lines, beginning with "Give us," are longer and varied and not so neat, yet all are multiples of three syllables each, as are the first five. Perhaps this design subtly represents the perfection of heaven contrasted with the disorder and jumble of life on earth…what do you think? But clear, in any case, is that the first half of the prayer offers God the praise and honor he is due, while the second half highlights our creaturely dependence on God for sustenance, forgiveness for our sins that defiled us, and deliverance from the evil that enslaved us. The prayer opens with the Father, our supreme good, and ends with the one who has been a liar and deceiver from the beginning, placing the words "the evil one" as far from "Our Father" as possible! And there is so much more to this prayer to discover through a lifetime of meditation on its words and author.

Jesus gives us this prayer as an example, a framework for praying well. Jesus does not give us a mindless incantation like the Gentiles used (Matt 6:7). When you use the Lord's Prayer as a starting point and truly ponder each line, opening your heart to the Father through Christ as led by the Spirit, you may be amazed by the richness of your experience. R.C. Sproul gives us an example in the Commentary section below.

Old Testament Connections

Some are troubled by the line, "And lead us not into temptation," because it seems to imply that the Father would otherwise tempt us. Some denominations have even changed their translation to "smooth out" that worry. But rather than "fixing" the Word of God by changing it (never a good practice!), we should seek to understand it properly. We can do that when we remember that Jesus speaks as the Old Testament speaks, and the last two lines are to be read together, as a united unit of thought, like a proverb. Calvin describes the meaning this way: "We are conscious of our own weakness, and desire to enjoy the protection of God, that we may remain impregnable against all the assaults of Satan." [1] This humble request acknowledges our helplessness in the face of evil apart from God's direct intervention and protection, the kind of thing one who recognizes they are "poor in spirit" says to their heavenly Father. David prays in the same way in Psalm 143:8–9: "Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. Deliver me from my enemies, O LORD! I have fled to you for refuge." Who could ever think that they no longer need God's help to fight against sin? "When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles" (Ps 34:17).

Commentary (David T. Irving, Michael Green, Martin Luther)

[Irving:] While many know the Lord's Prayer by heart, it is much more than a prayer to recite. It directs the structure, content, and priorities of Christian prayer. For what kinds of things should Christians pray? In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray for God's name to be honored, for God's church to flourish, for God's commands to be obeyed, and for God's providence to be respected. It directs us to God to supply our needs, forgive our sins, and protect us from temptation and the devil.

Each petition is like a heading in a book, under which we elaborate our own specific praises, confessions, and needs. Hallow God's name with praise for His wonderful attributes and works. Pray for God's kingdom to advance through you, your pastor, supported missionaries, and fellow church members, and for unconverted

friends to be brought to the King. Name your needs in prayer for daily bread, and so on. Christians have used the Lord's Prayer in this way for centuries. Brief resources such as the Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q&A 98–107) and longer ones such as Thomas Watson's *The Lord's Prayer* can help you fill the petitions with your own personal praises and requests.

The Lord's Prayer helps us pray even before we reach the first petition. The preface—"Our Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:9)—teaches us that prayer begins with God. That may sound obvious, but stop and think about your own prayers. What sets their trajectory and priorities? Is it God's name, character, and work? Or is it your own felt needs? Our desires and needs have an important place in prayer, but the Lord's Prayer shows us that we will pray for them rightly, and confidently, only if we begin with God.

First, the Lord's Prayer teaches Christians that God is our Father. The entire gospel is built into the opening two words: "Our Father." Christians have been born of God and, through faith in Christ, have the right to become children of God (John 1:12–13). Christians have received the adoption as sons and the Spirit of God's Son (Gal. 4:4–7). In prayer, Christians address God with the same name used by God's only begotten Son. Prayer begins with God, who, through the gospel, is our Father...What confidence this gives us in prayer! If sinful earthly fathers know how to give their children good things, how much more our Father in heaven (Luke 11:9–13)?

Second, the preface to the Lord's Prayer teaches Christians that God is gloriously great and perfectly holy. We pray to "our Father *in heaven*." God is in heaven. He is above all creation. "Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?" (Ps. 113:5–6). He is everywhere present. "Heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you" (2 Chron. 6:18). He accomplishes all His holy will. "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases" (Ps. 115:3). He rules over all. "Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool'" (Isa. 66:1). And He is perfectly holy (Pss. 11:4; 20:6; 89:5; 102:19). Prayer begins with the infinite God, who reigns in holiness from heaven.

When you forget God, it is easy to doubt and hard to pray. But the Lord's Prayer won't let you do that. Begin your prayers with God—our Father in heaven—and follow Christ in laying all your cares at His feet.

[Green:] This marvelous prayer … has depths we shall never plumb. It comes in a rather different form in Luke's Gospel. There is certainly a different thrust to it. Luke's account is focused on people who needed to know how to pray: most of his readers were Gentiles. Matthew's account is primarily directed towards Jewish people who already pray, but need to know how to pray correctly, with the simplicity and directness Jesus longs to see in his disciples. And the prayer shows them. It is not, of course, the *Lord's* Prayer. He did not use it himself: he told them to use it. He never needed to pray, '*Forgive us our debts*.' No, it is really the Disciples' Prayer, and only as we enter the life of discipleship can we appreciate its meaning. [3]

[Luther:] To this day I suckle at the Lord's Prayer like a child, and as an old man eat and drink from it and never get my fill. It is the very best prayer, even better than the psalter, which is so very dear to me. It is surely evident that a real master composed and taught it. What a great pity that the prayer of such a master is prattled and chattered so irreverently all over the world! [4]

[1] John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 327–28.
[2] David T. Irving, "Teach Us to Pray," Tabletalk Magazine, October 31, 2026.
[3] Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 99–100. Edited.
[4] Martin Luther, "A Simple Way to Pray, for Master Peter the Barber, 1535.