

Teach Us to Pray, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: Lord, Teach Us to Pray: The Model Prayer

Matthew 6:9–13

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Matthew 6:9-13 stands at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, and it is the single most important passage in this study for shaping how your class actually prays. What is at stake doctrinally is the very nature and order of prayer. Jesus is correcting two errors at once. Against the pagan idea that prayer is a technique of many words that wears God down (vv. 7-8), he teaches that we come to a Father who already knows our needs. And against shapeless, self-centered praying, he gives a deliberate order: God's name, kingdom, and will come first, and only then our bread, our forgiveness, and our deliverance. Help the class see that this is a model to pattern our praying after, not a magic formula whose mere recitation does the work.

Two phrases call for doctrinal care. First, "your kingdom come" must not be taught as if the kingdom is only a future earthly reign yet to begin. Jesus announced that the kingdom of God had drawn near in his ministry, and it was established when his church began at Pentecost. Christ reigns now from the right hand of the Father. So we pray "your kingdom come" as a prayer that God's present reign would advance in hearts and in the world, and be brought to its full consummation when Christ returns. Second, the forgiveness petition (vv. 12, 14-15) must be handled so that grace remains grace while the seriousness of an unforgiving heart is not softened. Forgiven people forgive; a refusal to forgive reveals a heart that has not truly received grace.

At the same time, this passage is intensely formational. The disciples asked to be taught to pray because they wanted the life they saw in Jesus, and the same hunger is in your class whether they can name it or not. The aim this week is not merely that students understand the petitions, but that they begin to pray differently: starting with God rather than with themselves, learning to want his kingdom and will, daring to ask for daily needs, and becoming people who both receive and extend forgiveness. Teach the words, but aim at the heart that prays them.

Question 1

Student Question:

Before giving the words, Jesus says, "Pray then like this" (v. 9). Is he handing us a prayer to recite or a pattern to follow, and what does the overall shape of this prayer (God's name, kingdom, and will first, then our needs) teach us about the priorities of real prayer?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by settling what kind of thing Jesus is giving. “Pray then like this” points to a pattern, a template for praying, not a script that must be repeated word for word to work. Luke’s slightly different wording of the same prayer (Luke 11) confirms that Jesus was not binding an exact formula on us. At the same time, the prayer is so rich that praying its very words with understanding is a wonderful practice. Help the class hold both: it is a model to imitate and a prayer worth praying.

Draw attention to the architecture of the prayer, because the order preaches. The first three petitions are about God: his name, his kingdom, his will. Only after that do we come to our needs: bread, forgiveness, deliverance. Jesus is teaching us that prayer rightly begins by lifting our eyes to God before we lower them to our list. This single insight, taken to heart, transforms a person’s prayer life.

Note the word “Our.” Even in private, we pray as members of a family, not as isolated individuals. The whole prayer is in the plural: our Father, our bread, our debts. Prayer joins us to the people of God; we carry one another when we pray.

Finally, connect this to verses 7 and 8, just before. Jesus has just said the Father knows what we need before we ask. So why pray at all? Not to inform God or to wear him down with many words, but because prayer is the way a child draws near to a Father and learns to want what the Father wants. The model prayer is training in that relationship.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Prayer as a pattern to imitate, not a magic formula whose recitation compels results
- The God-first order of prayer: name, kingdom, and will before our own needs
- Prayer offered to a Father who already knows our needs (Matthew 6:8)
- The plural “our”: prayer binds us to the whole family of God
- The difference between many-worded pagan prayer and trusting, relational prayer

Discussion Prompts

- What is the practical difference between using this prayer as a model and treating it as words that work automatically?
- Why do you think Jesus put God’s name, kingdom, and will before our daily needs?
- If the Father already knows what we need, what do you think prayer is actually for?

Question 2

Student Question:

Look honestly at the order of your own prayers. Do they usually begin with God, his name, his purposes, his glory, or do they begin and end mostly with your own needs and worries? What would change if you let this prayer reorder where you start?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and it works best if students answer it honestly rather than ideally. Invite them to picture their actual prayers over the past week. Most will find that their prayers begin and end with themselves: their stresses, their requests, their people. That is not shameful, but it is incomplete, and the model prayer gently rebukes it.

Help them see the diagnostic value of the order of their prayers. Where we start reveals what is central to us. A prayer life that rarely lingers over God's name, kingdom, or will has quietly made self the center. The cure is not guilt but reorientation: deliberately beginning prayer with God.

Offer a concrete practice. Suggest that this week they begin each prayer by dwelling on God himself before bringing a single request, perhaps praying the first half of the model prayer slowly before adding their own words. Small reorderings like this, repeated, reshape the heart over time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-examination through the order and content of our prayers
- The tendency to make self the unspoken center of prayer
- Reorientation, not guilt, as the path forward
- Concrete habits that retrain the heart to begin with God

Discussion Prompts

- When you replay your recent prayers, where do they tend to begin?
- What would it feel like to spend the first minutes of prayer only on God, before any requests?
- What is one small change to the order of your prayers you could try this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus teaches us to begin, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (v. 9). What does it mean to approach God as "Father," and how does "in heaven" and "hallowed be your name" hold reverence and intimacy together so that closeness never slides into casualness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question opens the riches of the address, "Our Father in heaven." That God invites us to call him Father is staggering, and it was not the ordinary way Israel addressed God. Through Christ, believers are adopted as sons and daughters and given the Spirit by whom we cry "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15). Make sure the class feels the intimacy here: we come to family, not to a stranger.

Then hold intimacy together with reverence. “In heaven” reminds us that this Father is the exalted, holy God, not a buddy or a household servant. And “hallowed be your name” is a petition that God’s name, his very self and reputation, would be treated as holy, set apart, honored in us and in the world. Intimacy without reverence becomes casual presumption; reverence without intimacy becomes cold fear. Jesus gives us both in a single breath.

Explain “name” in the biblical sense. A name stands for the person, the whole of who God is. To hallow his name is to want God to be known and honored as God. This is the first request Jesus puts on our lips, which tells us that the chief end of prayer, and of life, is the glory of God, not the satisfaction of self.

Bring it home. To pray “hallowed be your name” first is to surrender the throne of our own prayers to God. It quietly reorders everything that follows. We are not summoning a cosmic assistant; we are coming to a holy Father whose honor we long to see, and that longing reshapes what and how we ask.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God as Father: the intimacy of adoption through Christ (Romans 8:15-16; Galatians 4:4-7)
- The transcendence of God held together with his nearness (“in heaven”)
- Hallowing God’s name: honoring the whole person of God as holy
- The glory of God as the chief aim of prayer and of life
- Avoiding both cold formality and casual presumption in approaching God

Discussion Prompts

- How does calling God “Father” change the way you approach him in prayer?
- How do reverence and intimacy keep each other healthy?
- What does it mean, in your own words, to want God’s name to be hallowed?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus invites you to call God “Father.” Honestly, how easy or hard is that for you? If the word “father” carries wounds or distance for you, how might the perfect Father Jesus reveals begin to heal and reshape the way you come to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question makes the fatherhood of God personal, and it touches a tender place for many. For some, “father” is a warm word; for others it carries absence, harshness, or disappointment. Be gentle, and do not assume. Give space for honesty without requiring anyone to disclose painful history aloud.

Clarify a crucial point: God is not a bigger version of a flawed earthly father. Jesus reveals the perfect Father, the standard by which every human father falls short, not the other way around. For the wounded, this is good news. The Father Jesus prays to will never leave, never abuse, never grow tired of his child.

Move toward healing and practice. Suggest that praying “Father” deliberately, even when it feels strange, is itself a step of faith that lets the true God begin to overwrite a distorted picture. Encourage students to bring their actual feelings about the word to God rather than pretending those feelings away.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The perfect fatherhood of God as the standard, not a projection of earthly fathers
- Healing of distorted images of God through the Father Jesus reveals
- Honesty before God about our wounds as part of prayer
- Adoption as the secure identity from which the Christian prays

Discussion Prompts

- What feelings does the word “father” stir in you, and where do they come from?
- How is the Father Jesus reveals different from any earthly father you have known?
- What would it look like to let God re-parent the way you see him this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (v. 10). What is the kingdom Jesus tells us to pray for, given that he announced it had already arrived and established his reign? What does it mean to pray for God’s will to be done, and how does this petition train us to want what God wants?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a doctrinally weighty petition and deserves clear teaching. “Your kingdom come” can be badly misunderstood as a prayer for a kingdom that has not yet begun, a future earthly reign Christ has not yet taken up. Scripture does not teach that. Jesus announced that the kingdom of God had come near and was breaking in through his ministry (Mark 1:14-15), and the kingdom, his reign, was established when the church began at Pentecost (Acts 2). Christ is reigning now at the right hand of the Father (Colossians 1:13; Acts 2:33-36).

So how do we pray “your kingdom come” if the kingdom has already come? We pray for the present reign of Christ to advance: that more hearts would bow to the King, that his rule would spread through the gospel, and that his church would live under his lordship. We also pray with longing for the day when that reign is brought to its full consummation at Christ’s return. The

kingdom is real and present now, and it is moving toward a glorious completion. There is no future thousand-year earthly political kingdom to wait for; there is the present reign of Christ to be extended and finally consummated.

Pair this with “your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” In heaven God’s will meets no resistance. To pray this is to ask that the same glad obedience would mark the earth, beginning with the one praying. It is a dangerous prayer, because it asks God to bend our wills to his rather than the reverse.

Help the class feel the formation here. These petitions train desire. We do not naturally want God’s kingdom and will above our own; we learn to want them by praying for them. Over time, praying “your kingdom come, your will be done” loosens our grip on our own agendas and aligns us with the King we serve.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The kingdom of God as present and established, with Christ reigning now (Mark 1:14-15; Acts 2; Colossians 1:13)
- Praying for the advance of Christ’s present reign and its future consummation
- A clear rejection of a future earthly thousand-year political kingdom (against premillennialism)
- Submission to the will of God as the heart of mature prayer
- Prayer as the training of desire to want what God wants

Discussion Prompts

- If the kingdom has already come in Christ, what are we asking for when we pray “your kingdom come”?
- Why is “your will be done” sometimes the hardest sentence to pray sincerely?
- How does regularly praying these petitions begin to change what we want?

Question 6

Student Question:

Be honest about whose kingdom and whose will usually drive your prayers. Where in your life right now are you praying mostly “my will be done,” and what specific situation do you most need to surrender with the words “your will be done”?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses “your will be done” into a specific, named situation. Most of us pray it in the abstract and resist it in particular. The goal is to help students locate the one area where they are quietly insisting on their own outcome.

Distinguish surrender from passivity. Praying “your will be done” is not fatalism or giving up; it is entrusting an outcome to a good and wise Father while continuing to act faithfully. It is the posture Jesus himself took in Gethsemane: honest desire (“let this cup pass”) held inside deeper trust (“yet not my will, but yours”).

Invite a concrete act. Ask each student to name, at least silently, the situation they most need to release, and to actually pray “your will be done” over it this week. Warn them gently that this prayer often changes the one who prays it more than it changes the circumstances.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Surrender of specific outcomes to God’s will, not vague resignation
- The Gethsemane pattern: honest desire held within deeper trust (Luke 22:42)
- The difference between trusting surrender and passive fatalism
- Prayer that reshapes the one praying, not only the situation

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to pray “my will be done” right now?
- What is the difference between surrendering an outcome and simply giving up?
- What situation will you pray “your will be done” over this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

“Give us this day our daily bread” (v. 11). Why would Jesus teach us to ask God for something as ordinary as bread, and what does this single petition tell us about God’s care for our everyday needs and about the kind of dependence prayer is meant to cultivate?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

With “give us this day our daily bread,” the prayer turns from God’s concerns to ours, and the first thing Jesus tells us to ask for is ordinary: bread. This is striking. The God of the kingdom and the cosmos invites us to bring him our groceries, our rent, our bodies’ daily needs. Nothing is too small to pray about.

Underline the word “daily.” The petition asks for today’s provision, not a stockpile for years. It echoes the manna in the wilderness, gathered fresh each morning, enough for the day. Jesus is teaching a daily, dependent relationship rather than a one-time arrangement that lets us forget God once our security is secured.

This guards against two errors. It rebukes the proud self-sufficiency that never thinks to ask God for material needs, as though we provide for ourselves. And it rebukes anxious hoarding, the

attempt to engineer enough security that we never have to trust. Daily bread keeps us coming back, hands open, to a Father who delights to provide.

Note what is not here. Jesus teaches us to ask for bread, what we need, not for luxury or excess. This quietly resists the notion that prayer is a tool for accumulating wealth. We ask the Father for our daily need and trust his wisdom and generosity with the rest.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's care for ordinary, material, daily needs
- Daily dependence pictured in the manna (Exodus 16) rather than self-sufficient stockpiling
- Prayer as the practice of open-handed trust in the Father's provision
- A quiet rebuke of both proud self-reliance and anxious hoarding
- Asking for need, not luxury (a guard against treating prayer as a tool for wealth)

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think Jesus made our first personal request something as plain as bread?
- What does the word "daily" teach us about the kind of trust God wants?
- How does asking God for ordinary needs change our relationship with him?

Question 8

Student Question:

Many of us either worry about our needs or quietly handle them on our own without ever bringing them to God. Which is more true of you? What would it look like this week to actually ask God for your "daily bread" instead of carrying it alone?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question exposes two opposite ways we avoid dependent prayer: worry and self-sufficiency. Some students carry their needs as anxiety, turning them over and over without ever turning them over to God. Others quietly handle everything themselves and would never think to pray about a bill or a body. Help each person identify which is more their pattern.

Reframe asking as relationship, not weakness. Bringing our daily needs to God is not childish; it is exactly the childlike trust Jesus commends. The Father is not annoyed by our needs; he invited them into the prayer.

Call for a concrete step. Encourage each student to choose one real, present need this week, large or small, and to actually ask God for it, daily, rather than only worrying about it or shouldering it alone. The practice itself teaches the heart to depend.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worry and self-sufficiency as two ways of avoiding dependent prayer
- Asking God for daily needs as childlike trust, not weakness
- Casting our cares on God rather than carrying them (1 Peter 5:7)
- Building a habit of bringing real needs to the Father

Discussion Prompts

- Are you more tempted to worry about your needs or to handle them without God?
- What is one real need you will start asking God for this week?
- What might change in you if you brought that need to God daily?

Question 9

Student Question:

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (v. 12), and Jesus adds in verses 14 and 15 that if we do not forgive others, neither will our Father forgive us. How can we receive forgiveness as a free gift of grace and yet be told our forgiving others is bound up with being forgiven? What is Jesus teaching about the kind of person a truly forgiven person becomes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson and requires careful balance. The petition ties our being forgiven to our forgiving: “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” Then Jesus underlines it in verses 14 and 15, the only line of the prayer he stops to explain: if we forgive others, our Father will forgive us, but if we do not forgive, neither will he forgive us. This unsettles people, and rightly so. Do we earn forgiveness by forgiving?

Answer plainly: no, forgiveness is never earned. Our debt to God is infinite and is canceled only by grace through the blood of Christ. We could never forgive enough to deserve it. So Jesus is not teaching that our forgiving purchases God’s forgiveness. He is teaching something equally serious: that a heart which has truly received God’s mercy becomes a merciful heart. The forgiven forgive. Where forgiveness is persistently, deliberately refused, it exposes a heart that has not actually grasped the grace it claims.

Use a parable to anchor this. The parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35) tells of a man forgiven an unpayable debt who then throttles a fellow servant over a trifle, and is condemned for it. The point is not that grace can be earned, but that grace, truly received, transforms; and a refusal to extend mercy proves that mercy was never really received. Forgiveness given is the evidence and overflow of forgiveness received, not its price.

Bring it to the conscience gently but honestly. Ask the class whether there is someone they are refusing to forgive. This petition will not let us hold a grudge and presume on grace at the same time. The good news is that the same Father who forgives our infinite debt supplies the grace to

release the smaller debts others owe us. Forgiving is hard, but we forgive as those who have first been forgiven much.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Forgiveness as a free gift of grace, never earned by our own forgiving
- The forgiven heart becomes a forgiving heart (Matthew 18:21-35)
- An unforgiving spirit as evidence that grace has not truly been received
- The seriousness of refusing to forgive (Matthew 6:14-15)
- Forgiveness as the overflow of grace received, not its purchase price
- Grace that both pardons and transforms

Discussion Prompts

- How can forgiveness be a free gift and yet so closely tied to our forgiving others?
- Why does a refusal to forgive call into question whether we have received grace?
- Is there someone you are withholding forgiveness from, and what would it take to release them?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole model prayer in Matthew 6:9–13: the Father’s name, his kingdom and will, daily bread, forgiveness, and rescue from temptation and evil. Which petition do you most neglect, and name one specific way Jesus is using this prayer to reshape the pattern of how you pray?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the whole prayer and asks for one honest application. Walk the class back through the petitions as a unit: the Father’s name hallowed, his kingdom and will sought, daily bread requested, debts forgiven and forgiveness extended, and rescue from temptation and the evil one. Each phrase is a school for the praying heart.

Note that the petition you did not ask about by itself, “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” belongs here too. It teaches our ongoing dependence on God for protection in a real spiritual battle. We do not graduate from needing to be kept. Make sure students see that the praying life includes asking God to guard us from the tempter and from ourselves.

Press for specificity over sentiment. Ask each student to name the one petition they most neglect, and one concrete change in their praying this week. Then close by praying the model prayer together slowly, as a class, so they leave having actually prayed it, not merely studied it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Synthesis of the model prayer as a pattern for the whole of prayer
- Ongoing dependence on God for protection from temptation and evil
- Spiritual formation expressed in a specific, nameable change
- Praying the model prayer with understanding as a lifelong practice

Discussion Prompts

- Which petition of this prayer do you most often skip, and why?
- What is one concrete way this prayer will reshape how you pray this week?
- How can the class pray for you as you put the model prayer into practice?