

Teach Us to Pray

Lesson 2: Lord, Teach Us to Pray: The Model Prayer -- Matthew 6:9–13

The disciples had watched Jesus do many remarkable things. They had seen him still a storm, open blind eyes, and feed thousands from a boy's lunch. Yet of all the things they asked him to teach them, only one request is recorded in these words: "Lord, teach us to pray." They did not ask him to teach them to preach, or to heal, or to handle a crowd. They had seen him slip away to lonely places before dawn, and they had seen him come back with a kind of strength that did not come from sleep. Whatever was happening in those quiet hours, they wanted it. They had a hunch that the secret of his life was hidden in his prayers.

So Jesus gave them a pattern. We have heard it so often that it can roll off the tongue like a jingle, but try to hear it the way they first heard it, slowly, phrase by phrase. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." In a handful of lines Jesus sketches the whole shape of a praying life: who we are talking to, what matters most, and how to bring our daily needs to a Father who already knows them.

Maybe your own prayers have grown thin and predictable, a quick list of requests fired off before sleep, or a tense plea in the moment of trouble. Maybe you have wondered whether you are doing it right at all, or whether God is even on the other end. Jesus does not scold the disciples for asking. He answers them. He hands them a model so simple a child can learn it and so deep that the oldest saint never exhausts it.

That is where this lesson begins. Jesus is not giving us a magic formula to recite, as though the right words said the right way will unlock what we want. He is teaching us to pray, training our hearts to reach for God before we reach for our list. Read these few verses slowly, the way the disciples first heard them, and let the Lord who prayed through whole nights teach you how to pray.

Group Discussion: Almost everyone has prayed at some point, and yet most people feel a little unsure they are doing it right. Why do you think prayer feels so awkward or uncertain for so many of us, and what do most people seem to assume prayer is mainly for? How might Jesus' answer to "teach us to pray" reshape those assumptions?

Personal Reflection: Think about the last week of your prayers, if you prayed at all. What did you mostly talk to God about, and what does that reveal about what sits at the center of your heart? If a stranger could listen to a recording of your prayers, what would they conclude you believe matters most?

Read Matthew 6:9–13

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. “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?
6. 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”?
7. “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?
8. 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?
9. “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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Luke 11:1–4, Luke’s account of the model prayer and the disciples’ request; Matthew 6:5–8, Jesus’ warning against showy and empty prayers and the assurance that the Father already knows our needs; Romans 8:15–16, the Spirit by whom we cry “Abba, Father”; Matthew 6:14–15, the link between being forgiven and forgiving others; Daniel 2:44, the everlasting kingdom God himself sets up and that shall never be destroyed.