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Help Me Pray

by Ken Bible

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Introduction

Some years ago the Lord challenged me to spend more time with Him in prayer. He specifically called me to use the Lord's Prayer as my guide:

*"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one,
for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen."
(Matthew 6:9-13, NIV)*

Over the years nothing has changed and enriched my life more than using this simple prayer. It has become the guide for my daily conversations with God. This book is written from my experience and is dedicated to all who long to talk to Him more simply and more freely.

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A Better Life Is Waiting

We all have hopes that drive us, things we look forward to. Some are long-term: a better house, a better job, a better life for us and for our families. Some are short-term and daily: more time off, less demands on our energies, more leisure.

But as time goes by, God keeps reminding me of one key fact. Through good times and bad times, successes and failures, no matter what happens or doesn't happen, only one thing will make life happier. Only one thing will make it more meaningful, more peaceful, and more satisfying--all I want it to be. That one thing is not a job, a house, money, or more time off. Our only lasting happiness will always be this: enjoying God's presence right now, in the present moment. In this life and through all eternity, our only true joy will be knowing Him.

Because of this, each of us has a better life awaiting us. It doesn't matter where you are in your journey--whether you're seeking God or you're a new Christian or a mature believer. You have a better life awaiting you through a closer, more constant relationship with Jesus Christ.

I'm learning that such a closer, more constant relationship comes primarily through prayer. It comes through spending more of life turned toward God. Just as with marriage, communication is key to enjoying a closer relationship.

Perhaps nothing generates more fear, guilt, and uneasiness among people than the subject of prayer. We know we should pray more, but we're not sure how. It seems so fuzzy, scary, and difficult.

But let me assure you: we were made for God. Talking to Him is simple and natural. Your educational level, your culture, your financial status, your personality--none of that matters. We were all made for God. You can talk to Him and have a close, personal, satisfying relationship with Him.

You have no reason to be afraid. God, your Father, only gives good gifts. And all He ever asks of us is to trust Him one step at a time.

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I Want to Know You

As I trust You,
I grow to know You, Lord.
As I know You,
I long to know You more.
Now with joy I turn
From all I've loved before.
I want to know You!
I want to know You!

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Jesus and His Father

Because prayer is the key to a happier, more satisfying life, I'm particularly interested in what Jesus teaches us about prayer, both through His words and through His example.

I read about His life in the Gospels--the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Bible. The more I learn about Him, the more I sense that He had a special relationship with God, His Father. I see it in His life. I hear it in His words.

- He seemed always conscious of His Father, always living in His presence. His Father seemed always right there with Him.
- He always had an open line to His Father. Their conversation wasn't isolated only to special times of prayer. Prayer didn't seem to start and stop. Their conversation was open and continuous.
- We think of Jesus as being a "super man," knowing absolutely everything around Him and being full of unlimited power popping from His fingertips. But as we listen to His words, we learn the opposite:

"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing." (John 5:19, NIV)

"The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work." (John 14:10, NIV)

Jesus was strong, not because of His own power, but because He made himself totally, constantly dependent on His Father. He had emptied himself of all His own power and ability (see Philippians 2:5-11). By being empty before God, He could be completely full of Him. By being weak in himself, He was always strong in God alone. He was constantly sufficient for every situation, not because He was strong in himself, but because He had made himself weak and completely dependent on His Father.

- Because of this relationship, Jesus seemed always relaxed and always focused.
- He was busy but never rushed. What a wonderful quality! Though under pressure, He never seemed tense. How I want that in my own life!

In all these things I'm not talking about some vague, abstract quality or a mystical state of mind. Read about Jesus' life. I want His peace, His strength, His joy, His love. Doesn't everyone? I want His open and constant relationship with the Father, for that is the key to His life.

So when Jesus talks about prayer, I want to listen. I want to take Him seriously. I want to learn and follow Him.

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Jesus Models Prayer

Jesus had so little time for His earthly ministry--only 3 years--yet He spent so much time praying. He was God's own Son, completely divine, yet He seemed dependent on prayer.

He prayed daily. His days were so busy that He usually prayed either early in the morning before the day or late at night after the day was done. He normally went off by himself and prayed in private.

He prayed at meals, thanking His Father for the food and blessing it.

He prayed at key times, before important decisions, sometimes praying all night.

One of Jesus' most fascinating prayers is in John 11:41-42. This is at the raising of Lazarus from the dead. It's the most spectacular, most amazing miracle of Jesus' life, yet His prayer is not a thundering invocation. It is so simple. "Father, We've already talked, and You've already heard My prayer. You always hear My prayer. I'm only praying aloud now so that everyone around knows that it's You who's doing this." The prayer necessary for the miracle had already taken place privately between Jesus and His Father. Then at Jesus' command, a man who had been dead for four days walked out of the tomb.

Most of Jesus' recorded prayers take place the week of His death. He prayed for His disciples, knowing He was about to leave them. When overwhelmed by grief, He prayed. He asked that if possible, the horrible death He was facing be taken from Him. Yet in the end, He humbly yielded to His Father will.

As He was dying on the cross, Jesus prayed not for himself, but for those around Him. His concern was God's will and God's glory, not His own comfort.

For Jesus, prayer didn't seem to be a duty or a burden. It was refreshing. It wasn't a drain on His time and energy. It was rejuvenating.

He didn't keep prayer in the first-aid kit for emergencies only. Prayer was the breath of life. It was His connection with the Father He loved so dearly, the Father with whom He wanted constant fellowship. Jesus was drawn to prayer, not driven to it.

That's the kind of prayer life I want.

The Lord's Prayer in Context

During the course of Jesus' earthly ministry, Jesus taught a lot about prayer. But He summarized much of His teachings in one model prayer, which we call the Lord's Prayer. It is recorded in Matthew 6:9-13 (and also on p.4 above).

The prayer occurs in a passage called the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew, chapters 5, 6, and 7. In this sermon Jesus gives lots of strong, practical wisdom about the way we should live day to day, here and now.

Much of what He teaches here will at first seem strange and difficult, even backward:

- *"Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . Blessed are those who mourn . . . Blessed are those who are persecuted."* (5:3-11, NIV)
- *"If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."* (5:39, NIV)
- *"Love your enemies."* (5:44, NIV)
- *"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear."* (6:25, NIV)

But behind all this Jesus lifts up a picture of our loving Heavenly Father, always with us, always caring for us. As we become aware of His presence, as we start looking to Him, everything begins to change. We begin to live in response to Him rather than in reaction to our needs and fears.

We have a loving Father who cares for everything we need. Thus we can depend on Him rather than scramble to look out for ourselves. Worry is unproductive and unnecessary. We are freed from the burden of self-concern, freed to love other people just as our Father loves them.

We can talk to Him person to person. He becomes our focus: we live to please Him alone, and we learn to trust Him with all our concerns.

Since our Father is always with us and always love, heaping up lots of words in our prayers is unnecessary and distracting. He already knows what we need. We don't have to badger, beg, convince, or explain. Simple trust needs only simple prayer. We can bring our needs to Him openly and directly as His children. He already knows the details. He is always listening, and He always wants the best for us.

Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer in this setting as a model for simple, personal conversation with our loving Father.

Six Wishes

Notice how short and simple is this model prayer. Nothing long-winded and fancy. Short phrases. Simple words.

The shape is also simple. The prayer is framed by an opening, *Our Father in heaven*, and a closing, *for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen*. The body of the prayer is six short petitions:

- *Hallowed be your name*
- *Your kingdom come*
- *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*
- *Give us today our daily bread*
- *Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*
- *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*

Think about this for a moment. What if God were to give you six wishes? You could ask for these wishes each and every day. What would they be? Money, health, comfort, a fulfilling life?

But look at the "six wishes" Jesus gives us in the Lord's Prayer. Our loving heavenly Father knows and wants what's best for us. What does He tell us to ask for every day? None of our typical requests are anywhere on the list.

Have you ever listened to children when they're on an outing? It doesn't matter what magnificent sights are all around them. Their requests are, "I'm thirsty," "I'm tired," "Do we have to . . . ?" "Is it lunchtime yet?" They react out of temporary desires. They speak out of pain, fatigue, or false expectations. They don't know what's best for them. They can't see the whole picture. They're entirely wrapped up in their own immediate comfort.

As God's children, we tend to react the same way. What we ask from God often has very little to do with our real happiness. We don't know what's best for us.

So why does our Father give us these six petitions to pray every day? The first three teach submission, asking for God's will. The last three teach dependence, asking for God's daily provision, His forgiveness, and His help in avoiding sin.

Why these six? Because they focus first and foremost on our relationship with our Father. They say, "Father, I need You. I need Your will, Your provision, Your forgiveness, Your protection."

The Lord's Prayer focuses on our relationship with God, our Father, for that is the key to happiness. That relationship is the key to peace, strength, and harmony in every aspect

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of life. Remember the example of Jesus. What we need most is a true and right relationship with our Father.

What kind of relationship with God does this prayer teach and form in us?

- Simple, natural, open, intimate
- Submissive, obedient, devoted
- Trusting, dependent

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How Do I Use This Prayer?

So how should we use this prayer? Should we repeat it by rote over and over, like a magic chant?

Would you talk to your closest friend that way?

Remember, in Matthew 6:7 Jesus taught us to avoid meaningless repetition.

True prayer doesn't come from our mouths anyway. God isn't fooled or distracted by our words. He listens more deeply. He listens to what pours from our hearts. Remember, prayer is the breath of our relationship with Him. It is the personal communication between us, being- to-being, face-to-face.

Therein lies the greatest benefit of the Lord's Prayer. It encourages a proper relationship with God, a relationship of submission and dependence. The prayer not only expresses our trust in Him but also strengthens and forms it. As we pray the prayer every day, it begins to shape our thoughts, our focus, our relationship with God, our entire lives.

So how do we use it on a daily basis? I make it the framework of my prayers. I pray one petition at a time, personalizing them as I go. I put each request in my own words and add in my concerns where they fall naturally.

Following is a series of chapters on the various phrases in the Lord's Prayer. Most chapters open with an example of how that petition might be personalized, just to get you started. The chapters also include brief explanations of the words along with practical life applications.

But remember, the main point is this: Come to your loving Heavenly Father simply and honestly, seeking His will and trusting every aspect of your life to Him. As you come to Him this way, you'll find that He responds to you in very personal and wonderful ways.

Our Father in Heaven

Father: A Radical Name for God

The Jews rarely called God *Father* before Jesus came. The whole nation of Israel was called God's son, and the king was sometimes referred to as His son. But an individual would not call God *Father*.

To the Jews, God's name was so holy they wouldn't even speak it. Those who copied scripture would take a bath before writing it. Yet here came this uneducated peasant calling God His *Father*. Read John 5:17-18. The Jews sought to kill Jesus because He referred to Almighty God as *Father*.

Yet Jesus teaches us to speak to God the same way. In fact, we are encouraged to call Him *Abba*, which roughly translates as *Daddy*. Though we are weak and pitiful creatures living on a speck of dust in one corner of the universe, the Great Creator wants us to speak to Him in the most personal and familiar terms.

I Am Welcome Here

Since prayer is the breath of our relationship with God, how wonderful to address Him as *Our Father*. A warm, trusting relationship is established from the very beginning. What a privilege to call God by this simple, personal name!

I call Him *Father* and we are one-on-one, face-to-face. Now prayer is not the daunting task of trying to reach up and talk to the Eternal Creator. Prayer is personal conversation, a quiet whisper directly from my heart to the ear of the Father. Simple. Warm. Intimate. He loves me. He is listening. I belong. I am welcome here.

In Heaven

This one I call *Father* is in heaven-- high above all history, almighty, all-knowing, holy. And this One who is above all is *Father* to me. I can come to Him as a small child with all my needs, unafraid and in complete confidence.

"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:11-13, NIV)

When I come to God, He not only gives me what I need. He gives me His own Spirit. His gives me himself. Somehow He joins His life to mine, enabling me to be the person He wants me to be. What a wonderful gift! What a loving Father!

Pray as One of His Children

But we've skipped a word. God is *our* Father.

When I first started using the Lord's Prayer on a daily basis, I was struck by one fact: there was no place for intercession. There was nothing that allowed me to pray for the needs of others.

Then I noticed that throughout the prayer, it's not "I" or "my" but "we" and "our." Yes, I can still pray for my personal concerns. "I" am included in the "we," and my Father asks me to come to Him. But the point is this: My prayers can be as broad or as narrow as my concerns at the time. My petitions can be personal. They can be universal.

How broad are your prayers? Or to ask it a different way, how low are your eyes? Are they focused entirely on yourself? Are they raised a little higher to take in those few immediately around you? Or have you looked up and realized that you are surrounded by an entire world of need, an entire race that's lost, desperate, hungry, and dying? God is our Father. Every person is His as well. He is deeply conscious of them. Are you?

There is nothing wrong with praying for personal and family concerns. But each of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer challenges us to lift our eyes, our hearts, and our prayers toward other people near and far. God is our Father. We all need His will in our lives, His daily provision, His forgiveness, His protection from evil.

Pray to your Father not just as His child but as one of His children.

Hallowed Be Your Name

*Hallowed be Your name.
May Your name be lifted up as holy.
May You be honored, worshiped,
feared, and exalted.
I worship You.
I stand in awe of You, Father.
May all the world worship before You.*

Hallowed be Your name--literally, *may Your name be sanctified* or set apart as holy. God's name is His reputation. When we speak of someone having a good name or a bad name, we're referring to their reputation.

So what are we asking for when we pray this petition? We are wanting God to be respected, worshiped, and exalted.

By whom? Are we praying that God be exalted in our own hearts or in the hearts of those around us or by the whole world?

The answer is yes--to all three. Remember that the Lord's Prayer never specifies the realm of the petition. It can be as narrow or as broad as our own concerns.

This petition can be personal. It is an opportunity to praise God for all He is and all He has done in our lives.

This petition can be a chance to get beyond our self-centeredness:

*Father, may You be glorified today, not me.
May You be honored
in my thoughts,
in my words,
in everything I do.*

This petition can be a prayer that those we love may come to know and worship God. Or it can express the deep desire that the entire world may honor and exalt the Living God. Can you imagine such a world? It is coming! This petition gives us a daily vision of that hope: our entire race bowing, worshiping before the one true God.

*Lord God,
may my children praise You.
May my neighbors and friends praise You.
May that struggling heart praise You
right now.
May Your Church praise You.*

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*May all the earth, all creation
praise Your holy name
forever and ever!*

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Your Kingdom Come

*May Your kingdom come
in my life today,
through all I do.
May Your kingdom come
in that meeting today . . .
in my family . . .
in our city . . .
in our world.*

A kingdom is a territory or a people ruled by a king. It is the domain of a king. A kingdom also includes all that the king brings to his people: his presence, his authority, his protection, his shaping of their lives.

Jesus came proclaiming, "The Kingdom of God is at hand!" The presence and rulership of the King had come in Jesus himself. He began establishing God's control over sin and all its effects in our lives. He forgave our wrongs. He cast out evil spirits. He healed our diseases. He taught us the right way to live.

But God's kingdom won't be fully established until God asserts His complete control in our world. Then there will be no more hunger or thirst. No more sin. No more tears. No more death. And we will hear the words:

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 11:15, NIV)

But you might wonder: Why does an all-powerful God take so long to establish His complete control over what He himself created? Did He lose control somehow? Hasn't He always been in control?

We can't pretend to understand all the ways of God. But as we read Scripture, we see that God has chosen to let His creatures exercise their free will--within His limits, to an extent and for a time. He allows us to make decisions. He allows us to choose, for He wants us to freely choose Him. Eventually those who separate themselves from God will die, for they have cut themselves off from the only source of life. Those who join themselves to God by simply trusting Him will be joined to Him fully and forever. God's kingdom will then be established in its fullness.

So when we pray *Your kingdom come*, we are asking God to exert His complete control in our world. We are asking that His wisdom and His love be given their full right of way in all things.

God's kingdom--His rulership among us and in us--is like a small seed. It grows very gradually, almost imperceptibly, even when we aren't conscious of it. (See Mark 4:26-

34.) As we see its beauty growing in our lives, as we experience its benefits, we pray ever more urgently, *Your kingdom come!* We long for the day when it will come completely.

As with the rest of the Lord's Prayer, we can pray *Your kingdom come* for our own lives, for the lives of our loved ones, for our community, and for the entire world.

This prayer is an excellent response to specific problems: *Father, may Your kingdom come in this situation.* I like this prayer because it is both bold and submissive. It is bold in faith, trusting and exalting God, holding up the beauty of His magnificent plan and believing He will fully accomplish it. It is submissive regarding ourselves, laying down our interests completely for the sake of His kingdom.

Isn't it odd? We spend our daily energies trying to gain more and more control over our lives and over the world around us. But when we get a taste of God's control and the wonderful things it brings, we realize we need to learn to turn loose of the control we have so fearfully grasped. We begin to pray each day:

*Father,
my wisdom is too limited.
My thoughts are too anxious
and too selfish.
May Your kingdom come
in my thinking,
in my speaking,
in all my work
and in all my relationships.
Help me to move today
by the wind of Your Spirit
in the rhythm of Your will.
Father,
in my heart,
in my world,
may Your kingdom come!*

Your Will Be Done

*Loving Father,
I face a tough decision.
May Your will be done.
Many thoughts and desires
are pulling at me.
I only want Your will today.*

Your will be done. Read Matthew 26:36-46, which recounts Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Especially note the closing words of verse 42. In the original language, Jesus is praying the exact words He taught us to pray here in the Lord's Prayer. In agony over what lies just ahead, sweating great drops of blood, He submits to His Father: *Your will be done.*

Jesus' use of these words gives us their flavor. This prayer reaches out to God in surrender and trust. We are simply asking God to do whatever He wants to do. We are leaving our situation, ourselves, our families, our every concern completely in His hands.

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As It Is in Heaven

*Father,
may You be glorified,
may You be in control,
and may Your will be done
on earth just as it is in heaven.*

A Look Ahead

On earth as it is in heaven apparently applies to all three phrases that precede it:

- *hallowed be your name . . . on earth as it is in heaven;*
- *your kingdom come . . . on earth as it is in heaven;*
- *your will be done . . . on earth as it is in heaven.*

The phrase brings to mind the vision of God's heavenly throne room from Isaiah 6:1-7. Picture this. God is seated on a great throne, high and lifted up. The train of His robe fills the entire temple. Winged creatures surround Him, bowed in His presence, eager to do His bidding, continually praising Him. Even the door-posts, considered the most stable part of a structure, shake at the sound of the thunderous worship. The entire room is filled with smoke, a sign of the mystery and majesty of God's presence. Everything, every creature is responding fully to the unspeakable wonder of God's presence.

Now lift your eyes to a day just ahead. All the earth has become God's throne room. Every creature and all creation respond fully and forever to the awesome magnificence of God. Praise, worship, and obedience are natural, joyful, and unbroken. Imagine it!

The Lord's Prayer plants that vision deep in our hearts. *Your glory . . . Your control . . . Your will on earth as it is in heaven.* The prayer lifts our eyes. It reminds us and points us in the right direction. It fuels our longing for God in His fullness. Day by day it gently assures us of the wonder that soon will be.

Our Deepest Daily Need

When I was younger, prayer was primarily telling God what I wanted. The opening petitions of the Lord's Prayer were only "ought tos." If reminded of them, I would force myself to think of a few things for which to thank God, then hurry into my concerns. "God, I need this, and this . . . right now!" My prayers were filled with the same self-centered anxiety that ruled my life.

But as I've gotten older, I've begun to realize that my daily needs come and go. God always meets them, one way or another. He is so faithful. What I really need is to start each and every day with God's perspective. I need to realign my heart and mind with Him and His purposes. The pressures of the day so easily knock me out of focus. The

Lord's Prayer provides a daily refocus, a tune-up, a renewed hope and vision. It's like a morning shower, natural and refreshing.

In other words, what I really need every day is *Him*. I need to reorder my life around Him, who He is and who He is to me. I need to see again His complete power, His unlimited love, and the beautiful wisdom of His plan for my life and my world. I need to see *Him* and be reminded of all He is doing.

God Alone

That's what the first half of the Lord's Prayer does for me. Note that there's no "I," "my," "we," or "our" in these three petitions. No mention of anyone but God. I'm reminded that what's really important, what I really want, is that He be glorified. I want Him to be in complete control and His will be done, just as fully here on earth as it is in the throne room of heaven.

Do you want to hear what God has to say to you? We're often told that we need to get quiet and wait before Him. There's value in that. But realize that it's not primarily physical noise that keeps us from hearing God. He doesn't usually speak audibly anyway. What blocks His loving whisper is the noise of our own plans and desires. We're so wrapped up in what we want that our hearts aren't tuned to His desires and His plan.

That's why the Lord's Prayer is so important. It quiets our hearts and minds before Him. We want only His plan. We desire only His will.

The Greatest Benefit of Prayer

Some mornings I get so caught up in this opening portion of the Lord's Prayer that I don't get to any other concerns. I've come to realize that God's great blessing to us is not giving us what we want in our selfishness, ignorance, and shortsightedness. His blessing is helping us to want only the best, to want only what He wants, knowing that He will gladly give it. He doesn't so much change reality to fit our desires. He changes our desires to fit His reality.

Therein is the secret of Jesus' relationship with His Father: He wanted only what His Father wanted. This prayer that Jesus taught us fuels that same desire in us.

*Father,
today
no glory but Yours,
no control but Yours,
no will but Yours.*

Give Us Our Daily Bread

*Give us today our daily bread.
Lord, give me the wisdom I need
for that problem.
Help my son with his test today.
Be with my wife in her situation at work.
Be especially near those believers
who are suffering today.
Encourage them,
and give them boldness.*

Context

Remember, the Lord's Prayer answers this question: How do we interact with a loving God who is always with us? He already knows all our needs, so we don't have to explain or beg or bury Him in words. We can talk to Him simply and directly, as children to our Father.

The Lord's Prayer has only six short petitions. The first three focus on God alone. We seek His glory, His control, His will. The last three petitions concern our needs. Of these three, two focus on sin, specifically its forgiveness and its avoidance.

Only one petition addresses the needs that usually consume most of our concern and our prayer. It is this: *Give us today our daily bread.*

Daily

The original word translated here as "daily" was found on a papyrus that turned out to be an ancient shopping list. The word "daily" marked those items the shopper needed to buy day by day (since there was no refrigeration).

Both scripture and personal experience teach us that God gives us what we need just one day at a time. One Bible story especially helps us understand and remember this. It's in Exodus 16:11-31. The people of Israel had left Egypt and were traveling through the desert on their way to Canaan. When they complained of being hungry, God gave them "daily bread." It was a flake-like substance called manna. Each morning it appeared on the ground after the dew evaporated.

Each morning they had to gather a supply for that one day. If they tried to keep enough for the next day, it rotted. But on the day before the Sabbath, they were to gather enough for two days. God didn't want them to have to work on the Sabbath. In this case, the manna kept overnight and didn't rot.

The result: *he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed* (v. 18, NIV). It was a daily provision, sufficient for any need but impossible to hoard.

God could have provided for their hunger any way He chose. Why would He choose this way? He was teaching them to depend on Him every day, one day at a time (see Deuteronomy 8:3).

Building a Relationship

Give us today our daily bread. Since the Lord's Prayer gives us only one petition to cover all of our normal wants and needs, doesn't this one seem small and unsatisfying? Most of us aren't worried about starving, at least not today. Why waste our one "wish" on such an unambitious request?

We want more. We want enough to feel secure. We want enough to relax a little in what we have. God wants the opposite. He works to keep us resting in Him alone.

Why? Because He enjoys flexing His power and His control? No. He loves us, and with a perfect wisdom. He knows that a constant, close relationship with Him is the key to our happiness and well-being. Daily dependence teaches and forms that relationship.

He is our Creator. He himself is the only source of all that is. We are weak and limited creatures, totally dependent on Him. We spend our entire lives, from birth to death, cradled in His care. *In him we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:28, NIV).

The essence of well-being, of having a right and true relationship with God, is realizing our utter dependence on Him and living in that dependence. Do you want complete peace and deep-down rest? Learn to trust your Creator's abundant wealth, not what you can grasp in your small little hands.

The School of Dependence

Our loving Father longs for that close, constant relationship with you. Because of His love, He will work throughout your life to teach you daily trust. You will never graduate from His school of dependence. He will not let you hoard everything you need, and you cannot see the future. Any security you think you've grasped is only an illusion. He will always and forever be your only security and your only supply. Even in the wealth and abundance of heaven, He himself will be the only source of every blessing.

The Freedom of Dependence

But daily dependence on God is not a burden. It is wonderful freedom! *Give us today our daily bread* lifts the weight of a futile concern for the future. It frees us to fully enjoy today. What a pleasure to accept each and every day from the loving hand of our

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Heavenly Father! Each need draws us closer to Him. Each provision reminds us of His presence and His love. Each meal becomes Thanksgiving.

Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:25-34 to look around at God's creation. The Father abundantly provides food and clothing for all His creatures, for all He has made.

We spend too much of our lives fretting about material things. We want, want, want, worry, worry, worry. But Jesus' prayer sweeps all our physical concerns into one simple prayer that asks only for today. No hoarding. No grasping for a security that will always elude us.

The rest of the Lord's Prayer is spent on God and our relationship with Him. This underlines what Jesus emphasizes later in the same chapter: *"Seek first His kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [the necessities of life] will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself."* (Matthew 6:33-34, NIV)

What do you and your loved ones need today? Wisdom? Financial help? Physical or emotional strength? Bring your concerns to your loving Heavenly Father and begin to trust Him one day at a time.

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Our Daily Bread

Lord, today, just today,
Our daily bread.
Lord, from You, just from You,
Our daily bread.

All we want and all we need
Can only come from You above,
So we're resting in Your wisdom,
And we're leaning on Your love.

Like the manna in the wilderness,
You give it every day,
So we walk with You by faith
And as Your children simply pray:

Lord, today, just today,
Our daily bread.

Forgiveness

*My Father, holy and loving,
forgive me.
I have been wrong in my thoughts,
my words, my actions.
I have failed to trust You,
and I've fallen short of Your
perfect and wonderful will.
Forgive me, Lord.
Restore me.
And help me forgive those
who have wronged me.*

One of Our Greatest Needs

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Matthew 6:12, NIV)

If you wrote down a list of your most pressing needs, what would it include?

Notice that when Jesus taught us to pray daily about our needs, two of the three petitions concern evil in our lives. He understood what was truly important in life, and He said that sin should be one of our chief daily concerns. Thus this fifth petition seeks forgiveness for the wrongs we've committed. The next one seeks to avoid them in the future.

Remember that the Lord's Prayer teaches us how to relate to a loving God who is always with us. We are weak creatures, unstable and inconsistent. If we're going to maintain a healthy, intimate, unbroken relationship with a holy God, a time of confession and forgiveness is essential.

We fail to trust Him, and thus we hinder His working in our lives. We fail to act in love. Without even thinking about it, we revert to our selfish thoughts and selfish ways. We need His forgiveness. We need His daily renewal.

Always Available

The wonder is this: if we turn to God openly, in simple trust, not even our sins need keep us apart from Him. He invites us to come to Him in daily confession, assured that His boundless love will gladly and freely forgive us.

His compassions never fail. They are new every morning. (Lamentations 3:22-23, NIV)

Forgiving Others

We can be so blind to our own faults. We cover them up. We rationalize them. We blame them on circumstances or on others. We do anything we can to sweep them under the rug. Often we successfully ignore our wrongs until we are faced with them in the pain and anger of those we love.

We tend to excuse ourselves and blame others. The Lord's Prayer teaches us the opposite. For our own good we need to be more conscious of our own failings and more willing to forgive them in others.

For all of us, for an entire race caught in its own sinfulness and helplessness, there is no alternative to forgiveness. Sin is a debt we cannot pay.

But we cannot embrace forgiveness for ourselves without embracing it for others, including those who have wronged us. Forgiveness cannot flow to us until it can flow through us to others. Notice that after giving us the Lord's Prayer, this is the one point Jesus emphasizes. *If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.* (Matthew 6:14-15, NIV)

Either we accept forgiveness as the response to sin or we don't. We cannot choose it for ourselves and deny it to others. Remember, the debt others owe us is infinitely small compared to the debt we owe God. (Read Matthew 18:23-35).

When a wrong has been done, pain is the result. Releasing that pain is difficult whether we committed the wrong or someone else wronged us. But God's forgiveness is both free and freeing. In the grip of guilt, we always have the option of receiving His forgiveness, simply and immediately.

And when we've been hurt by another, He gives us the freedom to forgive that person completely. We always have the privilege of passing along the wonderful forgiveness we have received. We don't need to wait for the other person to come to us before forgiveness is granted and peace restored to our hearts. If we look to God and depend on Him, He will enable us to love and understand others as He loves and understands them.

Today and every day, experience the joy of receiving and giving God's forgiveness.

*Loving Father,
morning by morning
bathe our hearts,
our homes,
our friendships,
our workplace,
our church and*

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*our world
in the healing and peace
of Your forgiveness.
Spread Your beautiful forgiveness
through me.*

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Deliver Us from Evil

*Father,
deliver us from the evil one today--
my wife,
my son,
my daughter,
my brothers and sisters in Christ.
Protect us, Lord.
Help us to watch and pray.*

The Need

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:13, NIV)

After we ask God to forgive our wrongs, we ask Him to help us avoid them in the future.

Face it: without God's grace, sin is a debt we cannot pay and a trap we cannot avoid. We are opposed and surrounded by spiritual forces much stronger than us. We are weak, and *our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* (1 Peter 5:8, NIV)

But *the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world* (1 John 4:4). Deliverance is always available as we trust our Heavenly Father who is always able, always with us, always in us. That is the beautiful message of the Lord's Prayer.

We, in all our weakness, can live in constant, close fellowship with a holy God. Christ has fully provided us that amazing privilege by His forgiveness and His Spirit within.

What hinders us? We get our eyes off God and onto lesser things. We forget that our greatest need is not comfort or respect or any of the "necessities" of life. Our greatest need is our own weakness. Our greatest need is the sin, the faithlessness, the lovelessness that plagues our lives and our hearts. We forget that without God's grace, sin is a debt we cannot pay and a trap we cannot avoid.

Don't Sleep Through It

To get a picture of your daily neediness, read Matthew 26:36-46. The scene is the Garden of Gethsemane just before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Both Jesus and His disciples were facing their hours of greatest trial. Jesus met the crisis with prayer and stayed faithful to His Father through incredible pressure and pain. The disciples crumbled and fled.

Why? They weren't even aware of their need. Their thoughts were elsewhere. Jesus had told them: *Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is*

willing, but the body is weak (Matthew 26:41, NIV). Instead they slept. Instead of meeting their weakness with prayer and dependence on God, they simply gave in. They failed to trust God, so they failed.

When we fail to trust God, we fail. Like the disciples, our hour of need is upon us, but we are preoccupied with other things. We are dull and lethargic. Like them, we need to *watch and pray so that we will not fall into temptation*. Our intentions are good, but we are weak. We must realize our constant need, then turn to God with that need. The Lord's Prayer helps us do that, day by day.

Why Lead Us Not?

But why do we pray, *lead us not into temptation*? Does the question imply that God might lead us into sin unless we ask Him not to?

The basic petition is, *deliver us from the evil one*. For emphasis it is stated in a negative way, *lead us not into temptation*, then in a positive way, but *deliver us from the evil one*. God will not lead us into evil, any more than He will let us starve unless we pray for daily bread.

The purpose of the Lord's Prayer is not to tell God something He needs to hear. The purpose is to align our hearts and desires with Him, to look to Him in our needs, to open ourselves to His working in our lives. We seek His glory, His control, His will. We turn to Him for our daily provisions. We seek His forgiveness and His deliverance from evil.

Summary

Stay aware of the danger of sin. Stay aware of your weakness. When life presses in, watch and pray. When you get spiritually drowsy, watch and pray. Day by day, watch and pray.

And remember: the Lord's Prayer is *us*, not just *me*. Our loved ones also need God's guidance and protection in a world of evil. Lift them up to Your Father. Ask Him to build a hedge around them. Ask Him to keep them and lead them to himself.

The Closing

*For yours is the kingdom
and the power
and the glory forever.
Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer closes with this doxology, which is an expression of praise. These words are not included in the earliest manuscripts of the Bible, so many scholars believe this ending was added later.

But whether these words are original or not, they are scriptural. They seem to grow from David's prayer recorded in 1 Chronicles 29:11:

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.

The Lord's Prayer closes as it began, seeking God's glory, His kingdom, and His will. Our whole relationship with an Almighty, all-loving, all-wise God is framed in this deep desire that He have His way completely, always and forever.

*Father,
may You be all in all
in my life,
in my family,
in the Church,
and throughout all creation
both now and forevermore.
Amen, Lord, Amen.
Let it be!*

Look to Jesus

Remember where we started? The key to happiness is a constant, personal relationship with God. It is enjoying God's presence with us moment by moment, always and forever. Prayer, simple communication with God, is the breath of that relationship.

We have looked at what Jesus taught about prayer because He embodied that constant, unbroken relationship with God.

Thus it should come as no surprise that Jesus exemplifies the lifestyle taught and formed by the Lord's Prayer. Read one of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, and this truth will leap out at you.

- Jesus called God "Father." That was His name for God. That was the way He thought of Him and interacted with Him--as His Heavenly Father.
- Jesus was entirely devoted to God's glory, God's rulership, and God's will. *"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me"* (John 4:34, NIV). He lived and died in obedience to God and for God's glory alone. Facing His torture and death, *Your will be done* are the exact words Jesus prayed.
- Jesus modeled complete and constant dependence on His Father. He only said what the Father told Him to say and did what the Father showed Him to do. He was homeless and died with only the clothes on His back. Yet He lived a full life, always sufficient for all life's demands.
- Jesus modeled forgiveness. He forgave even the vilest of sinners during His lifetime and died praying for the forgiveness of those murdering Him.
- Jesus endured the full range of human temptation yet remained perfect and sinless. *We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.* (Hebrews 4:15, NIV)

But the whole truth is more wonderful still. Jesus not only lived out the Lord's Prayer. He lives it out in *us*, today, every day. Jesus has given us His own Spirit. As we trust Him step by step, He lives within us, filling us with himself, joining His Spirit to our innermost being. Jesus not only helps us to pray as we should. He himself is the answer to each petition of the Lord's Prayer. God's greatest gift to us is not a "something." It is himself!

- The Spirit of Jesus within us gives us that connection with God that enables us to know Him as *Father*. Read Galatians 4:6.

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- The Spirit of Jesus will glorify God through us. As others see our loving deeds and sense the Spirit of Jesus in us, they will be drawn to God and will end up praising Him (Matthew 5:16).
- Jesus himself brings the kingdom of God into our hearts and lives. He is God's presence, God's rulership, God's sovereign protection.
- The Spirit of Jesus nurtures God's righteousness in our lives and leads us into His perfect will for us.
- Jesus said, "*I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died . . . I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever*" (John 6:48-49, 51, NIV). Jesus himself, God's presence with us and in us, is God's daily provision for our needs.
- Jesus forgives our sins. By His loving Spirit He also gives us the strength to forgive those who have wronged us.
- As we follow the leading of the Spirit of Jesus, He will draw us away from temptation and deliver us from the evil one.
- Jesus is worthy to receive *the kingdom and the power and the glory forever*. One day every creature in heaven and earth will sing in one grand unison, "*To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb [Jesus] be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever!*" (Revelation 5:13, NIV)

Do you want to understand the Lord's Prayer? Look to the life of Jesus.

Do you want to absorb the spirit of the Lord's Prayer? Look to the life of Jesus.

Do you want to enjoy Jesus' own relationship with God our Father? Pray as He taught us to pray. As you trust Him step by step, day by day, need by need, He will join His Spirit to yours and live His beautiful life in and through you.

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