

Series: From Israel to Everyone: Disciples who Demonstrate God's Presence (a study of Matthew).

Sermon Text: 6:7-18 The Lord's Prayer
to ask questions)

(See App for lesson, slides, and

Open your Bibles to Matthew 6:7-15. This section contains one of the most well-known passages in all the Bible, what we call the Lord's Prayer. Whereas today we'll only have enough time to mine its riches at a high level, fret not, because all four of our advent sermons in December will look at the Lord's Prayer in much more detail. In this section of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus continues telling his followers what their lives will look like if they are rightly living out their walk with God. As Brandon pointed out last week, we are not just basking in God's forgiveness, but instead we should be actively living out God's grace in a life which demonstrates God's presence. If, like me, you think prayer is great in theory but find it hard to put into practice, you may be encouraged, as I was, to learn that some of the greatest names in Christianity like Martin Luther, John Newton (who wrote Amazing Grace) up to a well-known modern day pastor, Tim Keller, who passed away recently, are on record stating praying was hard for them. Let's go to Scripture where we will see this...

BIG IDEA:

**Prayer isn't a performance to move God's hand;
it's a child re-aligning their heart with a Father who already loves them.**

In **verses 7-8**, interestingly enough, Jesus first tells us how **NOT** to pray: ***And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases (other translations say vain or meaningless repetitions) as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*** Prayer is not a mechanical recitation of spiritual words. God is not a cosmic vending machine where you hit the right buttons (D-7) so God knows what you want, and then if you hit the “*dispense*” button enough times, out pops what you ask for. There is no rule that the more you repeat yourself the more likely God is to answer you. God is not deaf, meaning you don't need to say 12 Hail Mary's, He heard you the first time. Here is a very important distinction though, **vain repetitions** are **NOT** the same as **persistent prayer** (praying for the same thing

more than once, or even every day.) We are actually commanded to do that! The very next chapter of Matthew (7:8) is where Jesus tells us, “*Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you.*” The Greek verbs used there are in the present imperative tense, which conveys a **continuous, repeated action**, and Jesus’s statement should be understood as “*Ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking.*” In Luke 18 Jesus gives us the parable of the persistent widow to teach us that ***we should always pray and not give up (v 1).*** It is a comforting thought that God our heavenly Father knows what we need before we ask him. In fact, He knows what we need better than we do. After Jesus tells us how **NOT** to pray, He now tells us **HOW** to pray in v 7-13, adding a commentary in vv 14 & 15. Through this prayer Jesus is teaching us the purpose of praying is to align our human longings with God’s divine priorities – placing God’s name, kingdom, and will ahead of our personal needs for sustenance, pardon and protection.

In **verse 9** Jesus says, ***Pray in this way***, meaning this a model for us to use, a structure to follow, and not something to be merely repeated word for word. When the disciples asked Jesus, “*Lord, teach us to pray,*” they weren’t seeking a basic tutorial. They knew how to pray. They grew up in a prayer-saturated culture where Jews recited standard blessings and petitions daily. I think they were looking for the secret sauce...some special, hidden quality or unique trick that would ensure their prayers would be successful. So, what does Jesus do? He takes the heart of those common well-known prayers and strips away all the religious fluff and gives them the basics. In other words, there is no secret sauce, **BUT** He does do something revolutionary. Instead of using formal titles like their prayers used, such as “*O, Lord our God, Sovereign King of the Universe,*” He tells His disciples to begin with “***Our Father in heaven.***” Jesus invites ordinary believers to approach a majestic and holy God with the trusted boldness of a child entering his father’s room. This famous picture of President Kennedy embodies this idea. He is sitting in what is arguably the most powerful “*throne room*” of earthly government. And who is there at his feet? His child. See this as a picture of you and your heavenly Father.

There is something else significant we learn from this opening of ***Our Father***. This prayer is for believers; it is not for unbelievers. “*John! Why would you say that!?*” Here’s why. The Bible teaches that in a familial sense, and contrary to what a lot of people think, God is not everyone’s Father. In addition to Jesus, only those whom God has adopted can rightly call Him Father. How do we get adopted? The Gospel of John (1:11-12) tells us “[*Jesus*] came to his own people, and his people did not receive him. ***But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, to them He gave the right to become children of God.***” The good news is that God gives an open invitation to **everyone** to be adopted into His family. So, “*If you’re not His child yet, how do you get adopted?*” Simple: You repent of your sins and place your active trust in Jesus alone.

Now, watch how Jesus starts this prayer—not by our asking for stuff, but by fixing our hearts on **God’s name, His kingdom, and His will**. He begins in **verse 9** with: **Hallowed (Holy) be Your name**. We are asking specifically that God’s name would be kept holy. God has many wonderful attributes, e.g. He is omnipotent (all powerful), eternal, loving, just, merciful, etc. But are the four living creatures around the throne continually saying, “*Omnipotent, Omnipotent, Omnipotent*” or “*Eternal, Eternal, Eternal?*” or “*Loving, Loving, Loving?*” No. What are they saying...right now? “*Holy, Holy, Holy*” (cf. Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4). By the way, to the Hebrew, repeating something three times was the highest form of emphasis. The original word for holy means “*separate*” or “*set apart*.” Holy here conveys two aspects of God we need to know: 1. God is completely different from and above all creation. 2. It also conveys His moral purity, in that God is completely separate from sin and evil. He is pure, right, perfect in every way. R.C. Sproul, a great pastor, theologian and author, who also passed away recently, pointed out that the holiness of God is not just one attribute among many, but the essence of God’s being that defines and permeates all His other attributes.

Recognizing God’s holiness is the beginning of aligning our priorities with His. So, before we ask God to fit into our small plans, Jesus teaches us to step into His massive, glorious plan in **verse 10**. The first part says: ***Your kingdom come***. When John the Baptist heralded the coming of the Messiah, he preached, “*Repent, for the*

kingdom of God is at hand.” When Jesus began his public ministry, He preached the same thing. The kingdom of God has **already been inaugurated** (begun) here on earth through the first coming, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but it will not be **fully consummated** until the physical return of Christ. And exactly when will that take place? Jesus told us that the Father has fixed the time, but He’s not telling anybody (cf. Acts 1:7). But His kingdom is coming, right? Yes. Can it be stopped? No. So, what is this petition all about? Are we asking God to move it up a few days or years? I don’t think so. By praying *May your kingdom come*, I think Jesus is reminding us of what we so easily forget: that you and I are currently citizens in that kingdom. And because of that, we are called to live by kingdom principles, not worldly principles! It’s important to remember that every time we choose to act based on kingdom principles, in a very real way, we are bringing God’s kingdom to earth now.

The next part of **verse 10** says: *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*. In Scripture the term God’s “will” is used two different ways. It can either refer to His sovereign will or His moral will. His sovereign will is what He **decrees**, his moral will is what He **desires**. Think of it like this: The first kind God says, “*I want this done, and I’m going to do it.*” The second kind God says, “*I want this done, and you are supposed to do it.*” **It’s this second kind of God’s will that we’re praying for here.** Here is a great example of the second kind of God’s will from 1 Thessalonians 4:3: “*For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.*” It is God’s will that we don’t sin sexually. Right? But do some people sin sexually? Yes. So, this kind of God’s will sometimes doesn’t happen. In this petition Jesus gives us, we are saying, “*Father, help me, empower me, give me wisdom so that I can make the things you desire to see happen, happen.*” Let me make a couple of quick observations :

1. Notice the important qualification here: God’s will is to be **done on earth** how? **As it is in heaven**. On earth, the unholy trinity—the world, the flesh, and the devil—resists God’s will being done. In heaven, there is no such resistance, so His will is carried out there in three ways: 1. **quickly**, 2. **completely**, and 3. **joyfully**. We should strive to obey God here on earth in

that same manner: not later, but now (quickly); not halfway, but all the way (completely), not begrudgingly, but with the genuine joy that comes from pleasing our Father in heaven.

2. In James chapter 4, James is speaking about prayer, and he makes a very interesting comment, *“You have not, because you ask not.”* I once heard a Christian speaker ask, *“What if when you get to heaven, and you say to God, ‘Why didn’t you do ‘this’ in my life,’ or ‘Why didn’t you keep ‘that’ from happening in my life.’ And God replies, ‘You never asked.’?”* Ouch! When I heard that illustration, I started bringing a lot more requests to God. I don’t want to hear God say to me, *“You never asked.”* Remember, God is a good Father who absolutely loves giving good gifts to His children. (Matthew 7:11). That should encourage us to bring all our requests to our Father, however big or however small.

We should note that while these first 3 petitions center on God, you and I can participate in answering the very petitions we are making. With the Spirit’s help, we can treat God’s name as holy, we can live kingdom centered lives, we can do God’s moral will here on earth. Now Jesus finally comes to our personal petitions in **verse 11**, starting with: ***Give us this day our daily bread.*** Bread is a metaphor for all our physical needs...everything necessary to sustain life. Asking God daily to provide us with our physical needs should remind us of our dependence on our Heavenly Father for all that we have. James 1:17 says, *“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...”* Note, we are to ask for our *“daily”* bread, not for our weekly or monthly bread. **Not** making this petition **daily** can lead to a false sense of self-sufficiency. I don’t need to pray this because I have a job, I’ve got money, I have a stocked fridge and pantry. I’m good! If I’m ever in need, then I’ll pray this. In reality though, it is so important to remember that whatever gifts, abilities, talents, opportunities you may have to obtain your earthly needs, you could lose those things overnight. Some people do. So, let’s not take God’s physical blessings for granted. In asking for our daily bread, we should learn to say please and thank you. And if I may say, God has blessed a lot of us here

with a surplus, more that we need, so I think it's entirely appropriate during this part of our prayer to ask God to stir up in us a heart of generosity and to give us wisdom to be good stewards in passing along some of what God has provided us to others in need and to ministries that advance the gospel of the kingdom.

The next personal petition in **verse 12** is: ***Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.*** Debts here refer to our sins. This petition recognizes two facts of life...that we sin against God, and others sin against us. When we sin, we incur a debt to God. We haven't just legally broken God's law, we have incurred a crippling debt that we could never come close to paying even if we sold everything we had and worked hard the rest of our life. And we are totally dependent upon God's grace when we ask Him for forgiveness because there is absolutely **nothing** we can do to earn it. So, what we need is not a better financial strategy or self-help plan but a **benevolent benefactor with infinite wealth** who is willing to wipe our slate clean, and that's exactly what the Father does. Jesus further gives a commentary on this verse in verses 14 and 15. ***"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,"¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*** We read that and say, **"What?!?"** If we read only these 2 verses, what might we conclude? *"Well, I thought I was forgiven, but this seems to say that if I die without forgiving someone who has sinned against me, God's forgiveness of my sins is rescinded, which means I'm barred from heaven, and instead my new destination is hell with every other unforgiven person."* Yes? I can assure you that is **NOT** what Jesus means. Because God is the ultimate author of the Bible, His Word is fully **unified** and **does not contradict itself**. So, when a particular Bible verse seems to do that, we must compare it with clearer passages on the same topic to find its true meaning.

Remember, this prayer is for believers. The Bible clearly teaches that when we trust Jesus, **all our sins—past, present, and future**—are forgiven once for all. God does not later *"unforgive"* us. This is **judicial** forgiveness: and through it we receive mercy instead of judgment. If that's the case then why would Jesus have those whose sins have been forgiven still ask God for forgiveness? Because while Judicial forgiveness secures our standing with God, our current sin still harms our fellowship

and intimacy with Him. Here we are seeking **relational** forgiveness—the forgiveness that restores a relationship. We understand this in family life. If my child offends me, I do not disown them, but our relationship suffers until they say, *“I’m sorry, Dad. I shouldn’t have done that. Please forgive me.”* Here’s one way to think about it. This forgiveness requested here does not affect the **FACT** of our salvation, it affects the **JOY** of our salvation. This is illustrated perfectly In Psalm 51 where David is finally repenting of his sin related to Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah. In it he prays to the *“God of my salvation”* (he knows he hasn’t lost his salvation) and says, *“restore to me the **JOY** of my salvation.”* Jesus teaches us to ask for this relational forgiveness in a particular way and for a particular purpose, *“Forgive me in the same way as I have forgiven those who sinned against me.”* Jesus is telling us that refusing to forgive others hinders our fellowship with God. Horizontal unforgiveness blocks vertical fellowship because closing our hearts to others keeps us from fully receiving and resting in God’s grace.

Our main problem is that we often underestimate the debt He canceled for us. **Forgiving others begins with grasping the magnitude of God’s forgiveness of us.** When forgiveness of those who have offended you is difficult, remember the debt God lifted from your shoulders. We were shown mercy when Christ absorbed our sin’s debt on the cross, and that mercy empowers us to show mercy to others by forgiving them. Ephesians 4:31 tells us to *“be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”* Those are our marching orders. When Peter asked Jesus, *“How often should I forgive my brother? Up to seven times?”* (Under traditional rabbinic law, you were required to forgive someone 3 times.) What did Jesus say in Matthew 18:22? “Not seven times but seventy times seven! It means offering limitless, unending forgiveness rather than keeping count.” So what does it actually look like to forgive as we’ve been forgiven? First, let’s be clear about what forgiveness is NOT: It is not saying what they did was okay. It is not pretending the pain isn’t real. And it is not ‘forgive and forget’—because you cannot force your brain to erase trauma. Forgiveness is choosing to hand the ledger over to God. It’s saying, *“Lord, this person owes me an apology, a childhood, or a restored reputation. But because you paid my impossible debt, I am refusing to spend*

the rest of my life acting as their debt collector.” Forgiveness is an act of heart-surrender before God that you can do today, even if the other person never repents. Reconciliation, on the other hand, takes time, safety, changed behavior, and rebuilt trust. With the Spirit’s help, you can fully forgive an abuser or a betrayal in your heart while maintaining firm, wise boundaries to keep yourself safe. Forgiving them doesn't make their sin right; it makes you free.

After personal petitions for **daily bread** and **forgiveness**, Jesus mentions one more in **verse 13**, ***And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*** Just so you know, the Greek word for **evil** here is in the masculine form, which allows it to be translated as “*deliver us from the evil one.*” The NIV translates it like that. Jesus is not talking about deliverance from an abstract concept of evil, He’s talking about deliverance from Satan. At first blush, it sounds like if I don’t pray this, God is going to lead me into temptation that might cause me to sin. Let me assure you, that is NOT what this means. First, James 1:13 states clearly that God never tempts anyone to sin. Second, the Greek word translated here “*temptation*,” simply means a test or a trial. That’s all it means. There are certain tests God will put us through to strengthen and refine our faith or to administer needed discipline, as any good father would do. But according to 1 Peter 5:8 Satan, our adversary “*prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*” Satan wants to put you through testing that leads to your destruction. And it doesn’t matter how strong you think you are spiritually, if Satan was ever allowed to come against you unrestrained, you would not endure. None of us would. So, we need this petition every day. This is the perfect place to point out that one of Satan’s primary traps (because it works so well) to render a believer ineffective or disturb their connection and intimacy with God is stoking unforgiveness in the life of that believer. One more thing, every time we pray this, it reminds us that Ephesians 6:12 (NASB) says, “*our struggles are not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of wickedness.*” That is something we need to be reminded of constantly!

Jesus then talks about the right way and wrong way to fast in **verses 16-18**. First some clarification. Fasting is not a hunger strike to force God’s hand. There is no, “*If I fast, God will grant me a wish*” rule. Fasting doesn’t change God, it changes us.

In simple terms, fasting starves our physical and cultural appetites to cultivate a deeper hunger for God's righteousness. Knowing this, let's now look at what Jesus says about it in Matthew 26:30: *"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."* This is very similar to his earlier warnings about giving and praying which focus on **motive**. And the warning is this: Don't do it for show. Don't do it so everyone can see how righteous you are. If that is your motivation for doing something good, then you've already gotten your reward, and you know what that is? Everyone mistakenly thinks you're spiritual. Fasting is not something we talk about much. But maybe we should. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is teaching us what genuine kingdom living looks like. That's why Jesus presents these things as:

Not "**If** you give...", but "**When** you give..." v 2
Not "**If** you pray...", but "**When** you pray..." v 5
Not "**If** you fast...", but "**When** you fast..." v 16

While the New Testament specifically commands us to pray and to give, there is no such specific command to fast. What do you take from that? Here's my two cents. It seems to me that despite the fact we are not commanded to fast, given what Jesus says about it and context in which He mentions it, our walk with God would be stronger, richer, and deeper if we did. As we are seeking earnestly to know God in a deeper and more intimate way, choosing not to fast is neglecting one of the sharpest arrows God has placed in our quiver for spiritual growth and maturity. Our giving, fasting and praying without fanfare, without a giant arrow pointing to ourselves, are quiet declarations that God alone is the true reward we are seeking.

Looking ahead. When prayer and fasting realign our hearts with God's kingdom, that alignment will inevitably affect how we use our physical resources. That's what Jesus talks about next. If God is our ultimate desire, how and where should we anchor our earthly treasures? That's what Brandon will be covering next week.

Whatever this message might encourage you to do, you don't have to do it alone. Please reach out.

Sunday to Monday Connection:

- **Question:** See questions above and below.
- **Next Step:** See questions above and below.
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to explore what all this might mean for you, please speak with someone you know here or one of our church leaders.

Takeaways to discuss with your people (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

1. How does beginning your prayers with God's holiness and kingdom shift the weight of your personal requests?
2. Jesus notes that God already knows what we need before we ask (6:8). If God is fully informed, what is the actual purpose and benefit of petitionary prayer?
3. Why does Jesus place such heavy emphasis on forgiving others' debts immediately after teaching us to pray (6:14–15)?
4. Use the Lord's Prayer as an outline for your daily devotions this week, pausing on each line to offer personal intercessions.
5. Engage in a 24-hour fast this week (from food, media, or coffee) and convert the time and money saved into intentional prayer for a specific broken situation in your community.
6. Write down the name of someone you hold a grudge against. Pray the line "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" over them, and make a conscious decision to release the emotional debt they owe you.

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the "sweet spot", spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- Bible Project - Gospel of the Kingdom [Videos](#) and [Podcast episodes](#).
- Bible Project - Heaven and Earth [Videos](#) and [Podcast episodes](#).
- Bible Project - Temple [Videos](#).
- Bible Project – Day of the Lord [Podcast episodes](#).

Quotes related to this passage:

- **A slight context shift:** “In chapter 5, this focuses more on the law, and on what it means to keep (or not to break) that law in one’s inner life and motivation. Now, in chapter 6, the focus is, to begin with, on the three things that Jews saw, and still see, as standard obligations: giving money, praying and fasting. In each case (we shall come to fasting presently) Jesus’ point is the same. What matters is the motive. If these religious duties are done with an eye on the audience, they become rotten at the core. Jesus doesn’t say that these outward things don’t matter. Giving money to those in need, praying to God day by day, and fasting when it’s appropriate—he assumes that people will continue to do all of these. What matters is learning to do them simply to and for God himself. All the Sermon on the Mount, in fact, is centred on God himself, who easily gets squeezed out of religion if we’re not careful.” (Wright, 54-55)
- **Examples of giving and prayer:** “Jesus, instead, wants us to be so eager to love and please God that we will do everything we should do for his eyes alone. Other eyes will be watching from time to time, and it’s very easy, particularly for clergy and others who are involved professionally with leading worship, to ‘perform’ for them rather than for God alone. For that reason he gives quite specific instructions about how to be sure of integrity, of the outward appearance being matched by the inner reality. When you give money away, do your best simply to forget about it. You may have to record it in your tax return, but even that could suggest a calculating spirit, and the point here is to match the outgoing, spontaneous generosity of God himself. The best way to be sure is for nobody else to know. The same applies to prayer. What you are in private is what you really are. Go into your inner room and talk to your father. You don’t have to make a song and dance about it, and indeed the fewer people that know you’re doing it the better. Nor do you have to go on mouthing pious phrases. You may find there are forms of words which help, as a framework or a starting-point; Jesus is about to give the disciples the framework he particularly recommends. But the point is to do business with God, one to one. Jesus doesn’t say what kind of reward we should expect. That, too, is part of the point. Simply knowing God better is reward enough; but there may be other things as well. You never know till you try. What is clear is that he is inviting his followers to a life in which inside and outside match perfectly, because both are focused on the God who sees in secret.” (Wright, 55-56)

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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