

# “QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS”

## Session 6 – The Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:5-15)

*Matthew 6:5-15 New International Version (NIV)*

*5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

*9 “This, then, is how you should pray:*

*“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.  
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”*

*14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

### **When you pray (6:5).**

Although individual prayer was appropriate at any time, pious Jews prayed publicly at set times: morning, afternoon, and evening. Josephus indicates that sacrifices, including prayers, were offered “twice a day, in the early morning and at the ninth hour.”

*Psalm 55:17 - Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.*

*Daniel 6:10 - Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.*

*Acts 3:1 - One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.*

**For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men (6:5).**

When the set time of prayer arrived, pious Jews would stop what they were doing and pray. This could be done discreetly or with a great deal of display. Some people were sure to find themselves in a place where they would be noticed, such as the synagogue or on a street corner. In those cases, the inner motivation for offering public prayer was public recognition and acclaim of their piety, which has no value with God. This kind of hypocritical prayer receives the same reward as hypocritical almsgiving: acclaim from people.

**But when you pray, go into your room (6:6).**

Since common people did not often have separate, private quarters in their homes, the meaning is intended metaphorically to emphasize privacy, or it may refer to a storeroom for grain and foodstuffs. Jesus does not condemn public prayer, because he prayed publicly himself.

**Do not keep on babbling like pagans (6:7).**

The priests of Baal continued from morning until noon to cry, “O Baal, answer us” (1 Kings 18:26), and the multitude in the theater at Ephesus shouted for two hours “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians” (Acts 19:34). Sincerity is of greater importance to God than length. Prayer must also be understood to not be a magic incantation, the efficacy of which is increased by length. Prayer is sincere, intimate communication.

Long continued prayer in itself is not improper - Jesus himself prayed through whole nights (Luke 6:12). He also commended in a parable the persistence of the widow in prayer (Luke 18:1). Prayer is much about changing us, our character, our will, and our values, even while we seek for God’s response.

**This, then, is how you (plural) should pray (6:9).**

Following Jewish custom, many Christians recited the Lord’s Prayer three times a day toward the end of the first century. Perhaps the earliest manual of Christian conduct we have is “The Didache,” or “Teaching of the Apostles,” written at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. It says (Did. 8.2–3): *And do not pray as the hypocrites, but as the Lord commanded in his Gospel, pray thus: "Our Father, who art in Heaven..." Pray thus three times a day.*

Jesus wants his disciples to pray as a group, using a “you all” to make the point. This is a prayer the entire community shares and prays as a body. The practice of “praying as the Lord taught us to pray” as an introduction to repeating the Lord’s Prayer together has good precedent here.

### **The model prayer for disciples: “The Lord’s Prayer” (6:9 – 13).**

While it is commonly referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer,” it is actually “the disciple’s prayer,” because it is an example for them – and us - to follow. The priorities of the prayer are in line with the consistent Old and New Testament practice of establishing the primacy of God in national and personal life. In the first three petitions Jesus calls the disciples to focus on the preeminence of God, while in the final three petitions he guides them to petition for their personal needs in a community context.

### **Our Father in heaven (6:9).**

The term for “Father” is ‘abba, a term used by children for their earthly fathers to express the warmth and intimacy a child experiences when in the security of a loving father’s care. The motif of the “heavenly Father” occurs throughout the Old Testament, growing increasingly popular during the Second Temple period in prayers for protection and forgiveness. The motif of a “heavenly Father” occurs throughout the Old Testament:

*Deuteronomy 32:6 - Is this the way you repay the Lord, you foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?*

*Psalms 103:13 - As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.*

Jewish prayers from around or shortly after the time of Jesus address God directly as “our Father.” Is Jesus reflecting a pattern of prayer of his time, or is he inaugurating it? Jesus can certainly reflect a relationship with God of “Father/Son” in a way quite new. Subsequently, the Jewish prayer “Ahabah Rabbah” begins, “Our Father, merciful Father,” and the first-century Eighteen Benedictions includes the petitions, “Graciously favor us, our Father, with understanding from you,” and “Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned against you.” The disciples have entered into a relationship with his Father as well, and so Jesus invites them to pray in this way.

In using a childhood form of “Father” (Abba), disciples are called to childlike trust, not to a shallow childish intimacy. They turn to him for protection and care. Though God is a unique and great figure, he is not unapproachable. Jesus’ stress on God’s proximity and the access believers have with him for his provision and care make his view of God deeply personal in emphasis.

### **Hallowed be your name (6:9).**

The first petition is directed toward God’s name. The purpose of hallowing that name (the name signifies the person) is that God will be “sanctified” or set apart as

holy among all people and in all actions. The Jewish Qaddish prayer, which likely goes back to Jesus' time, begins similarly: *“Exalted and hallowed be his great name in the world which He created according to his will.”* This affirms the typical Jewish expectation that God is to be treated with the highest honour.

Access that develops close relationship does not need to destroy respect. So the first address to the Father is the statement that his name be “hallowed,” that is, kept holy. God is unique and set apart in character. As we pray to him, we recognize that we are not communicating among peers. Rather, we come humbly before a being who is unequaled in the universe. Whatever awe we give to anyone in a prominent position on earth is nothing compared with the respect owed to God. Thus the opening remark sets a proper tone for our spirit as we begin.

Over the centuries there developed within Israel a reluctance to utter God's name, especially the unique name Yahweh (YHWH). Various substitutions were used, such as “Lord” (Adonai). Jesus' disciples will honor God's name in their prayers, but especially as they submit to his power and authority.

### **Your kingdom come (6:10).**

The Jewish Qaddish prayer says: *“May he establish his kingdom in your lifetime and in your days, and in the lifetime of the whole household of Israel, speedily and at a near time.”* The Old Testament looked for God to send his anointed one to rule the earth. Now that Jesus has inaugurated that kingdom, his disciples live with the anticipation of the Kingdom coming in its fullness. This petition is reflected in a prayer expressed in the early church in “marana tha,” “Come, O Lord!” The return of Jesus was believed to be imminent; our lives today are to reflect that same sense of immanence, as Jesus stressed in multiple parables.

### **Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (6:10).**

God reigns in heaven absolutely, which means that all of heaven experiences his perfect will. Jesus prays that earth will experience that same rule of God.

Jesus' own utmost act of obedience in his earthly ministry was to submit to will of God the Father: *“My food ... is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work”* (John 4:34), and he faithfully carried it out to the end, as he affirmed in the Garden of Gethsemane: *“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will”* (Matt. 26:39, 42).

Jesus taught that those who carry out the Father's will become his disciples (Matthew 12:50 – *“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”*). Jesus' disciples are the present living testimony to the world that God's will can be experienced today.

**Give us today our daily bread (6:11).**

“Bread” is a figure of speech for “food” (4:4), referring to all of the believer’s needs, physical and spiritual. The word translated “daily” (epiousios) in connection with “bread” recalls Israel’s daily reliance on God for manna in the desert (Exodus 16). In the same way as manna was only given one day at a time, disciples are to rely on daily provision for life from God, helping them to develop a continuing, conscious dependence on him.

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

Sin creates an obligation or “debt” both to the offended party as well as to God. The evidence that a person has truly been forgiven of his or her debt of sin is the willingness to forgive others (cf. 18:21–35), a sentiment found commonly in Judaism: *“Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray”* (Sirach 28:2).

Jesus’ disciples have responded to his charge to repent, and their sins are now forgiven. But they are not simply to enjoy their own state of forgiveness; they are also to forgive others. Those who have received forgiveness are so filled with gratitude to God that they in turn will eagerly forgive those who are “debtors” to them.

This does not teach that humans must forgive others before they can receive forgiveness themselves; rather, forgiveness of others is proof that that disciple’s sins are forgiven and he or she possesses salvation (*as in the parable of The Unmerciful Servant - Matthew 18:21–35*). Disciples are to forgive those who have wronged them - evidence that a person has truly been forgiven his or her debt of sin. If we don’t forgive, it is evidence that we haven’t experienced forgiveness ourselves. It is wrong to ask from God what we are not willing to give to others.

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

This phrase reflects the standardized Jewish morning and evening prayer:  
*Bring me not into the power of sin, And not into the power of guilt, And not into the power of temptation, And not into the power of anything shameful.*

God is not one who tempts his people to do evil (*James 1:13 - When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone*). The phrase is better understood as “test” – situations in which our faith is put to the test, through temptation to succumb, or to simply give up.

While the New Testament is full of encouragements that such “trials” increase our faith, this prayer, which asks to *“deliver us from evil,”* can perhaps best be understood in light of St. Paul’s counsel (1 Corinthians 10:13): *The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will*

*not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.*

**Liturgical ending:** *“For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.”*

The “doxological ending” that many Christians are accustomed to pray did not originally conclude the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew’s Gospel. The best and oldest manuscripts do not have it, and the earliest commentaries on the Lord’s Prayer do not mention it. Neither does it appear in Luke’s parallel prayer (Luke 11:2–4).

This doxology does occur in a variety of forms in many later manuscripts. Although it was not originally in Matthew’s Gospel, it is in line with many other scriptural concepts and probably reflects early Christian practice of adapting the prayer for liturgical use in the church, perhaps on the basis of 1 Chronicles 29:11: *Yours, 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, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.*

### **Forgiveness and prayer (6:14–15).**

Jesus concludes his instruction on prayer by reiterating the emphasis of the part of the prayer concerning forgiving others (6:12). Once disciples have received forgiveness and salvation, they are to forgive with the same forgiveness with which they have been forgiven. This is the evidence that they are indeed forgiven. Forgiving others is not a prerequisite for our own forgiveness; but the refusal to forgive others prevents us from experiencing the benefit and freedom of our own forgiveness. The prayer strongly implies that a refusal to forgive is a sign that forgiveness – salvation – has not been fully embraced.

### **Standard Form of the Lord’s Prayer - English Language Liturgical Consultation**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom the power, and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.