

The Lord's Prayer

by George Mueller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of secrecy in prayer, the nature of prayer, and the significance of forgiveness and dependence on God.

Scripture: Matthew 6:5

Topics: "Forgiveness", "Prayer"

Description

George Mueller emphasizes the significance of sincere prayer in his sermon on 'The Lord's Prayer,' urging believers to approach God in humility and secrecy rather than seeking public approval. He explains that true prayer is not about vain repetitions but about a heartfelt connection with God, who already knows our needs. Mueller elaborates on the meaning of each petition in the Lord's Prayer, highlighting the importance of forgiveness and reliance on God's provision. He encourages believers to recognize their identity as children of God and to seek His glory above all. Ultimately, he calls for a genuine relationship with God that leads to true happiness and fulfillment in Christ.

Transcript

A Sermon preached at Bethesda Chapel, Great George Street, Bristol, on Sunday Evening, March 21st, 1897.

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him.

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.

Thy kingdom done. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you:

But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.--Matthew vi., 5-15.

WE will meditate on part of Matthew vi., commencing at verse 5 : "When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward." In reference to not a few of the Pharisees of old this was actually the case. They would stand for a long time in the synagogues praying; but what was far worse than this, when the ordinary prayer time came for the Israelites-about three o'clock in the afternoon by our time-they would so manage it that just at that very time they could be found at the corners of the streets, where they might be observed in the act of prayer by as many as possible coming from various directions. All this was hypocrisy. They professed thus to be very holy men, but in reality it was the reverse. "Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward." Their reward was the applause of their fellow-men. A poor, miserable recompense.

"But when thou prayest, enter into thy closet." The great point here is the secrecy in reference to prayer. Not all persons are in such a position as that they have a little chamber to which they can retire and lock the door. But if it can be done, it should be done. If impossible, God will accept according to our position and circumstances. I remember a case which I would relate to show how persons may be situated. About 50 years ago I went to Germany to find missionaries for the East Indies. On this journey I came to Magdeburg, one of the strongest and largest fortresses of the kingdom of Prussia. Here I found in the house of a godly man in the Army a comrade of his, and, as he lived in barracks, I said, My dear brother, how do you manage with regard to prayer, as you are continually surrounded by hundreds of soldiers?" His reply was, "When I want to pray in secret, I go down into a large sand-cellar, which is perfectly dark, and there I kneel down on the sand. No one is able to see I am there, though often some of my comrades come close to my heels; but never am I found there. I am alone, perfectly alone; no one sees me; and that is my closet." So in whatever variety of ways the children of God may be situated, they have to do the best they can. But the great point is that as much as possible we should seek to deal with our Heavenly Father in the way of prayer in secret; and under no circumstances aim to be noticed by our fellow-men in order to get their applause.

"When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door" (thus further stating the exceeding great importance of secrecy). "Pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." Where there is this, a secret waiting on God, He, in His Own time and way, will give the open recompense. He will show that He is noticing; He will show that He has recorded it in the book of remembrance; He will show that it has not escaped His observation. "Thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." The secret waiting on God will be manifested by blessing. As assuredly as we thus give ourselves to prayer, God will notice us, and give blessing, that anyone can see.

"But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do." That is, sentence by sentence, repeating the same request, just as Baal's worshippers did, and as the heathen nations do up to the present time, thinking that the more their words, the more the repetition of what they ask for, the more certain is it that they will get it. "Use not vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking; be not ye, therefore, like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him." Prayer is not necessary for the sake of informing God; but prayer is necessary simply because it is the appointment of God. He will have us go to Him for our own good and profit and blessing, asking Him for the things we require, because the blessing bestowed on us in answer to prayer is so much the more precious than if the blessing were given without prayer. Often and often God allows us greatly to be tried, in order that at last, when the blessing does come and prayer is answered, it may be all the more precious to us "Be not ye, therefore, like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him."

Now comes what is commonly called, "The Lord's Prayer." After this manner, therefore, pray ye." This shows us it is not God's appointment that these words of the Lord Jesus Christ should only be used, nor that we should continually use them. But in the spirit, in this manner we should ask blessing. That is the lesson we have to learn. "After this manner pray ye, 'Our Father, which art in Heaven.'" The very first word is full of meaning. The petitions which are recorded here are suitable, and only suitable, for the children of God-for they are the prayer of the heavenly family, those who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have to keep this before us, that as long as we are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, God is not our Father. God is God to us. He is our Creator. He is our Preserver. He is the One Who supplies us with everything that we can need. He lets His sun shine for us; He lets the rain fall also, so that we are benefited by it. But until we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, God is not our Father. Now this word "Our," shows that we are part of a family, part of the heavenly family; and thus it is that all who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of their souls, after having been convinced that they are sinners, deserving nothing but punishment-all such as are believers-have in God Almighty a Father. "Who art in Heaven." His place is everywhere; but especially is it in Heaven, not on earth, though His power may be seen everywhere, and the manifestations of His presence be found throughout the universe.

"Hallowed by Thy Name." That is, Thy Name be honoured; Thy Name be glorified. And here I remind my beloved Christian friends of the meaning of the word "Name." It does not mean the several letters which form the name of "God," but what we learn in the 34th chapter of Exodus, when Jehovah proclaimed His Name before Moses. It is His Character, His Attributes, what He is Himself, which are to be glorified. Jehovah, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of all those who believe in Jesus is to be glorified. That is the meaning of "Hallowed be Thy Name;" and just in the proportion in which we enter into what God is, we find out what a lovely, lovely Being He is, how infinitely lovely He is, "Hallowed be Thy Name." In other words, "I pray that Thou mayest be more and more honoured and glorified."

Now comes another petition. "Thy kingdom come." That is, "Hasten the time, bring it about speedily, when Thou shalt universally be honoured, when Thou shalt universally be glorified, when all the works of the wicked one shall be destroyed." This will be after the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. See how entirely impossible it is for the ungodly, the unconverted, to ask this petition from the heart. The lips of such may utter it times without number, but the true meaning is nothing short of this: "Let the time speedily come when I, a wicked creature, shall be cast into the bottomless pit." That is just the meaning of the prayer when so uttered; and of course this plainly shows that only in ignorance the ungodly could ask the petition, "Thy kingdom come." The words can only properly be used by those who are believers in the Lord Jesus,

for they beseech Him soon to return, that God universally may be glorified and honoured by everyone on earth. That this is the meaning we see immediately from what follows.

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven." Since the fall of Adam and Eve, the will of God is not done on earth. It was done before the fall of Adam and Eve in Paradise, but from the moment they ate of the forbidden fruit, and sin was introduced by the devil on earth, from that moment the will of God was not done to the full on earth, as it should be, and as it will be hereafter when the Lord Jesus Christ has returned. Let us clearly keep this before us. One of the first things which was done after the fall was that the first child of Adam and Eve, Cain, murdered his own brother, Abel. There we see the fruit of sin entering into the world, and ever since then the will of God has not been "done in earth, as it is in Heaven." There have been those godly in spirit, at various times, who have sought in their feeble measure to glorify God, and to walk to the praise and glory and honour of His Name. But the great mass of human beings on earth have not been doing the will of God, as the will of God is done in Heaven.

"Give us this day our daily bread." Here the daily bread does not mean simply bread and nothing else; but it means the necessities of life generally. What we require we ask God for, and are allowed to ask God to give to us. Notice, particularly, that it is not stated here, "Give us our daily bread," but "Give us this day our daily bread." That means we are not warranted to expect a great abundance, in the way of supply of earthly things. God may be going to fill our hearts with cause for gratitude; God may most abundantly give to us the necessities of life beforehand, and a long time beforehand; but if He does not do it, we are not to blame Him, far less to consider He is not faithful to His promise, for He has not promised that He will give us years beforehand, neither months beforehand, neither weeks beforehand, neither many days beforehand, the necessities of life; but He has only promised that day by day we shall be supplied, and this also only under the condition that we seek first the Kingdom of God, and His Righteousness. In other words, if we walk in the fear of God, making it our business to win souls for Him, and to set a good example of godly walk and behaviour before our fellow-men, we shall then as assuredly as we trust in Him be supplied with the necessities of life. For so did David say, "I have been young and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed "-i.e., his children, his descendants-" begging bread." "Give us this day our daily bread." On this petition we may write clothes, house rent, taxes, supplies for all that which our family requires. All this is implied in the petition for daily bread. And how precious to have to go to a Loving Father, Whose very joy and delight it is to answer the petitions of His children. He is not a hard Master, an austere Being, but an infinitely loving Father. Oh, that increasingly it might come to everyone of the children of God to look at Him as an infinitely loving Being; for when we are brought to this state we are perfectly satisfied at all times, and under all circumstances with His dealings with us. Whether painful or otherwise, we are satisfied that He doeth all things well.

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." This implies the owning that we are sinners. It is a matter of exceeding great importance that we give ourselves to God as we are, not seeking to make out that we are very good people, very excellent people, that we walk habitually in His ways and act according to His Mind-for the very reverse is the case, more or less, with everyone of us even the best among us. Therefore, we should increasingly own before God that we are sinners, that we have not acted at every time and under every circumstance according to His Mind, and have accordingly contracted debts, spiritual debts, because we are transgressors. We should own that we are debtors before God, and ask His forgiveness, for Christ's sake, seeking it in God's appointed way through Jesus. Not on any account seeking forgiveness by pretending henceforth we will live a better life, that we will make up for our misconduct; that can never be done. We can never make up for past transgressions, for moment by

moment we are expected to love God, with all our heart, with all our strength, with all our might, and to walk in His ways to the praise of His Name. Therefore we can never by our own doings make up for past misconduct. But, through faith in Jesus, if we put our trust in Him for salvation, the Righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. In other words, the holy work and life of the Lord Jesus is put to our account, as if we had been blameless, as if we had been without sin, as if we had walked as consistently all our days as the precious Jesus did. His righteousness is imputed to us, and by that alone forgiveness is to be obtained-putting our trust in Him, seeing Him hanging on the cross, shedding His blood as the Sinbearer, Who made an atonement for our sins, and through Whom alone we can obtain reconciliation.

"As we forgive our debtors." This is particularly to be noticed. If anyone has offended us, transgressed against us, behaved improperly towards us, are we ready to forgive? Are we habitually forgiving? Even if it should occur many times, yet if the individual who offends us, and behaves improperly towards us, makes confession, we are to be ready to forgive, and, supposing this to be done, it is stated, "As we forgive our debtors." Here I would particularly mention that we are not warranted to expect answers to our prayers if we are not acting according to this. I judge that this often and often is a hindrance to obtaining answers to our prayers, because we cultivate an unforgiving spirit, we are not ready to forgive those who have offended us and behaved improperly toward us. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," that should be true of us.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Our weakness, our helplessness, our nothingness remain, as long as we are in the body, and we shall be liable to temptation, and exposed to temptation. The Lord Jesus Christ found this. It may be in our case, as it was with Him, that for a season the tempter leaves us. For a season he may not specially seek to overpower us, but it will be only for a season, he will come again. That, however, is only one side of the truth; and the other side of the truth is this, that God is ready to succour and help His children. All through their pilgrimage, if they only own their weakness and come to Him and seek His assistance, He is ready to help. Our prayer, therefore, is to be this; that God, in the riches of His grace, would allow us no more to be tempted than is absolutely needful for the glory of His Name, and to become more and more acquainted with His power, with His love, and His readiness to appear on our behalf.

Then it is added, "But deliver us from evil." That more especially means the devil himself; "from the evil one, the wicked one, deliver us." For it is he who is the source of evil, and the greatest evil, since it is he who has such craftiness, and is continually ready to get an advantage over us. Therefore, above all, our prayer should be this: "Deliver us from the wicked one, the evil one, the devil; allow him not to get an advantage over us;" and this prayer is to be uttered from the heart, to the very last moment of our earthly pilgrimage.

We never get into that state that we are so perfectly holy, so perfectly sinless, so perfectly Christ-like, as that the devil can never get an advantage over us. Oh, let us seek to enter into it! I tell you my own experience in this very thing is this: I distrust myself more than ever, I own before God more than ever my own weakness and helplessness, and I have continually cried to God to keep me from the craftiness and the deceit of the wicked one, for were I left to myself, aged as I am, and long as I have walked in the ways of God, and in some little degree also in the fear of God, to His honour and glory, in love and holiness-yet with all this, were I left to myself my life would end just as Asa's did. For thirty years he had glorified God greatly; but in the last two years of his life he dishonoured God deeply. So, on account of my own weakness, my prayer continually is, "Lord, grant that I may finish my course with joy, and not to the shame and dishonour of Thy Holy Name."

"For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." These words bring before us "the Why" to expect answers to our prayers. The Kingdom is the Lord's, He, therefore, is able to do it. He is the Mighty One, the Powerful One. "Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever." Thou, O God, art not changing, there is no variation found in Thee. Thou art able to succour us. This is still further confirmed by the word "Amen." Yes! So it shall be. In this evil world we shall greatly cheer ourselves and comfort ourselves by this very statement here, "Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen." Oh, how precious the prospect, that we do not speak into the air, but that we speak to the loving heart of God Almighty, Who can do everything and Who is willing on behalf of His children to do everything that is for their real blessing in Christ.

Now, in the next and last two verses, we have that which I have already referred to. "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Here we see that not only are we not warranted in expecting answers to our prayers if we do not forgive our fellow-men, when they have offended against us, and have done things which are improper; but also we shall lose the knowledge and the enjoyment which springs from the consciousness of the forgiveness of our own sins. It is plainly stated, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." And I believe that in this we have the secret why in our day there are found so many true children of God whose life and deportment indicate that they are believers in Christ, but who yet do not enjoy the forgiveness of their sins. In the case of not a few we have reason to believe it originates from there being something in their mind which they seem to be unable to pass over regarding offences they have suffered from others, and that they have not forgiven. If this is the case they cannot wonder why they do not themselves enjoy the knowledge of the forgiveness of their own sins.

Now, this little portion on which we have been meditating says to us afresh, "What an unspeakably blessed thing it is to be a child of God." Thus I have found it during the past seventy-one years and five months that I have been a believer in the Lord Jesus! Oh, I cannot express to any who are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ what they lost by staying away from Him! There are so many who suppose that to become a Christian is a wretched and miserable thing, that to become a believer in Christ and to give the heart to the Lord Jesus shuts us out from life, from everything, and from every particle of enjoyment. A false notion altogether. The very reverse, the very reverse is the case! I repeat what I have said more than once, that with all my might, as a young man under twenty, I sought happiness in the things of this world, and I had the opportunity of finding it if it could be found in this way at all. I was passionately fond of the theatre; I was fond of the ballroom; at the card table, at the billiard table, and in all kinds of worldly societies I was found, and at the head of them very frequently as a leader; but instead of finding real, true happiness it was nothing but disappointment that I met with continually. At last I thought, "Oh, if only I could travel a great deal, how happy that would make me!" God allowed me to taste this. I travelled forty-three days in succession, day by day, day by day. I saw the most beautiful scenery to be seen under heaven; but after six weeks I became so sick of travelling that I could pass the most beautiful scenery without even looking at it. Five weeks after I found Jesus, I found my Heavenly Friend, and the very first evening I was lying peacefully on my bed as a forgiven sinner, in peace with God. I blessed and praised Him for it. And without having to say to me, "Now it must be out with the theatre, it must be out with the card table, it must be out with the ballroom"-without anyone speaking to me a word, for I had not seen a single Christian to converse with, that was a settled matter.

I was regenerated now, born again, having obtained spiritual life after I had been twenty years and five weeks dead in trespasses and sins. Therefore, I say, without anyone saying a single word to me, it was a settled matter that my whole life must be changed and altered. And thus it was; and what has been the result? I became instantly a very happy young man, and I have been a happy man in middle-aged years, and I am a happy man, yes, an exceedingly happy man, greatly advanced as I am now in years. O,

"If all the world my Jesus knew,

All the world would love Him too."

But it is because the unconverted think it is a miserable thing to come to Christ that they stay away from Him. The truth is this: That only, only, only through faith in the Lord Jesus can real, true happiness be obtained. Therefore, any who have put this to themselves and stayed away from Christ, let them do so no longer, let them own that they are sinners, deserving nothing but punishment, and put their trust alone in Jesus for the salvation of their souls, and the result will be that they will obtain peace and joy in God, even as I found it when I was brought to Christ. May God grant that this may speak to the hearts of those who as yet have been going on thoughtlessly and carelessly and unconcerned about the things of Heaven.

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