

# The Lord's Prayer

by John A. Broadus

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*The Lord's Prayer is a model of prayer that teaches us to prioritize God's glory and seek forgiveness and daily bread.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:9-13, Matthew 26:41, Luke 11:1, Romans 12:21, 1 Corinthians 10:13, James 1:13

**Topics:** "Christian Prayer", "Gods Glory"

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## Description

John A. Broadus preaches on the Lord's Prayer, emphasizing the importance of understanding it as a model of prayer rather than a fixed form to be repeated. He delves into the significance of the petitions related to God's glory, highlighting the need for God's name to be hallowed and His reign to come in the world. Broadus also explores the practical lessons from the petitions concerning our own needs, such as asking for daily sustenance, seeking forgiveness for sins, and praying for strength to resist temptation and evil.

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## Transcript

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Matthew 6:9

The prayer which thus begins, which for many ages has been called among Christians "the Lord's Prayer," is above all eulogium for its sweetness. No wonder this is so! For our Lord presents it as a specimen, as a model of prayer. He said, "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking," saying over the same thing a thousand times. "Be ye not therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." Thus then do ye pray-this way and not with vain repetitions, not with much speaking, thus do ye pray! He gives it as a sample, as a model. So on a later occasion, recorded in the 11th Chapter of Luke-probably a long time after this, most likely in quite another part of the country, certainly on a later occasion-our Lord was praying himself, and when he ceased, the disciples asked him "Teach us to pray" and he said "When ye pray, say:" and then he gave them substantially the same prayer as the one here before us.

Now it very naturally occurs to many persons that our Lord has given this as a form of prayer; that when we pray we ought always to say these words. I do not object to using these words whenever anyone thinks them appropriate, that they express his sentiments; but it is very certain that our Lord did not give this as a form of prayer. If you will notice a moment I shall prove it. On the second occasion the prayer is very different from that which we here read. Even in the common text, it is different in several expressions; but if you will take any revised text as furnished by any competent scholar of the day, you will find that the

prayer on that occasion is quite different. Allow me to repeat it as it is there. You all know the words as they occur here but on that second occasion this is what he said: "Father, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And bring us not into temptation."

Now you observe that I have omitted several phrases of the familiar prayer given here in the Sermon on the Mount. If you look a little closely you notice that nothing of essential importance, no distinctive idea, has been omitted here. Instead of "Our Father which art in heaven," you have simply "Father." You have lost some pleasing words, but you have really lost no part of the essential thought. When after the petition "Thy kingdom come," you find wanting the words "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," you observe in a moment that although a pleasing expression has been expunged, it is involved in the preceding petition, "Thy kingdom come;" for when God's reign on earth is fully come, his will must of necessity be done on earth as in heaven. And so, when after the prayer "Bring us not into temptation," you miss the words "But deliver us from evil," you observe that they do, at most, but express the other side of the same truth; something that is implied in the words that remain.

On that second occasion then, our Lord has omitted no idea that belongs to the prayer. It is substantially the very same, but in form it is exceedingly different. Is not there the proof at once that he did not intend this as a form of prayer? If he did so intend, why in the world should he not have repeated his form correctly on the second occasion? No: he intended it not as a form of prayer, that precisely these words should be used, but as an example, "Thus do ye pray." Avoid the vain repetitions and much speaking of the heathen: Thus: thus comprehensively; thus simply. Oh, how much is included in these few, brief, simply expressed petitions! "Thus then do ye pray."

And my brethren, I venture to ask your special attention to this model in one respect. We have two good classes of petitions here, as is obvious at once, petitions with reference to God's glory, and petitions with reference to our own good. And my point is, that the petitions with reference to God's glory come first. Now you have noticed, and indeed it seems natural to us that when we pray, we pray first about ourselves, and a great deal about ourselves, and then if we do not forget, if there seems to be time left before we close the prayer, we may introduce some petitions as to God's glory. But here the class of petitions which refer to God's glory come first. That is their rightful place. I do not feel they should always come first in order, that there ought to be any formality or stiffness in it, but that they should often be put in the place of priority, and regularly in the place of pre-eminence. Much more important is it that God's name should be hallowed, and God's kingdom come in the world, than that you and I, as individuals, should gain the blessings we desire.

And now I propose to you, that while of course we cannot bring out many of the thoughts involved in this comprehensive prayer, we shall try to get some practical lessons from it.

I. Observe first, the petitions which relate to God's glory.

1. "Hallowed be thy name." The words are so simple, we have known them so well from our childhood, that it is really difficult to stop and ask what they mean. Let thy name be made holy. God's name represents himself. It is a prayer that his name, and himself as represented by his name, may be regarded as holy-spoken of as holy-treated as holy. We have a model here in the picture given by Isaiah, the adoring Seraphs covering their faces in awe before the throne. What do they cry? Not, as often we do; great, majestic, glorious-not a word about his power, nor even about his wisdom-"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord

God of Hosts." That is the central thought, that ought to be our deepest desire, that God may be regarded, and spoken of, and treated, as holy.

Oh, what a contrast between that scene of the vision, and the sights and the souls of this world in which we live. Walk the streets anywhere; listen to the talk wherever you find it, especially when men grow excited. Hear them! Hear how that high and holy name is bandied as a jest and polluted with profanity. It is enough to make a man shiver to hear the profanity that abounds everywhere. I have shivered, literally, sometimes as I listened. But my brethren, have we nothing to do but to look with horror at other men's profanity? There are some things important to our own life here. Have a care that while you may not use in vain the sacred name of God itself, you shall not fall into the practice of using other sacred expressions lightly and irreverently. I have heard even refined ladies use phrases in a light way, that were appropriate only in solemn prayer; and to a certain extent that was irreverence, that was profanity. Have a care about indulging wit that comes from profaning the language of Scripture, and allusions to God. Bluff old Dr. Johnson once said that "a man that has any respect for himself ought to be above that kind of wit, it is so cheap: any one can do that." Yes, anyone that has any respect for himself ought to be above that kind of wit, and a man that has any reverence for God ought to shrink from it. Have a care how you repeat the profanity of other men. You want to tell a good story and the point of it perhaps lies in a profane expression. Now is it that you should repeat that expression? Is it good for yourself to repeat it? Is it healthy? Especially is it good for that boy there that is hearing, and may not make the nice distinction that you make, when you repeat other men's profanity? I would not inculcate scrupulosity about trifles, but perchance this is not a trifle, and it seems to me that we who pray this prayer, ought to lay such things to our hearts, and shrink with horror, and cultivate ourselves into shrinking with shuddering, from anything like profanity. Oh, that God's name might always be spoken with deepest reverence. Oh, that God himself might come to be everywhere thought of, and talked about, and obeyed, as holy. Anyhow, let us try to have it so in our hearts, on our lips, in our lives.

2. And the second petition, "Thy reign come." I am not going to explain all these simple words of course, but here is one that wants explaining. The Greek word which is rendered "kingdom" in the text requires three English words to convey its meaning. Primarily the word means "kingship," the condition of being a king, the possession of royal power. Then secondarily it means "reign," the exercise of royal power. As a final derivation it means what we call "kingdom," subjects or territory over whom or in which this royal power is exercised. Kingship, and reign, and kingdom. There are many cases of that kind in translation, where several terms have to be used in one language to convey the meaning of a single word in another. Now the leading thought here is evidently that which we express by the word "reign." And the reference is to the Messianic reign which the prophets had long foretold; that Messianic reign of which David had sung; that Messianic reign which John the Baptist had declared was now near at hand, and Jesus at the beginning of his ministry in Galilee took up the same cry, "The kingdom of heaven is near at hand; repent therefore and believe the good tidings." Men had long prayed that that reign might come, and now there was all the more propriety in such a prayer, for it was near at hand.

Do you think there is no need of that prayer still? Do you think the reign, the Messianic reign of God in the world, has come? It has but begun. It was beginning when Jesus taught these teachings. It began still more when he rose triumphant from the grave and ascended glorious into the sky. It began still further, on the day of Pentecost. It began in another sense at the destruction of Jerusalem, which he spoke of beforehand as the time when he should come in his kingdom. It has begun on the earth, ah! it has not come yet. Alas, for the wide portions of the world where the very name of the King Messiah has not come.

Alas, in the metropolis of one of the great Christian nations of today, the great mass of the men that surge around us, are utterly unsanctified by the gospel, utterly heedless of the reign of God. Stop any moment and think, between two heartbeats, of this great world you live in, of this great city you live in, and then you shall address yourself with new fervor to the prayer: "Thy reign come, O God! thy reign!" Anyhow, let it come in us; let it pervade our whole being; let it control our whole life; let it sanctify our home life; let it elevate our social life; let it purify our business life; let men feel, as they note our conduct, that we are subjects of the Lord God.

3. I shall not dwell, for lack of time, upon the third petition here, which is but an expansion of the preceding. For, as I have said, whenever God's reign has fully come, then his will must be done on earth. Many things occur now that are not according to God's will. The prayer is that God's will may take place; that everything may happen on earth in accordance with God's will, as in heaven everything does happen. Many times for us, I know it is hard even to consent that this shall be so. When it is plainly God's will that something should happen, which to us is painful, we shrink and with difficulty we say, "Thy will be done." No wonder: it has been so with better persons than we are. Certain disciples, when they besought Paul not to go up to Jerusalem and he would not be persuaded, ceased and said: "The will of the Lord be done." The struggling Saviour in Gethsemane as he strove in agony and prayer to nerve himself up for what he had to bear, said again and again-for it would not stay said: "nevertheless, not my will, but thine he done." No wonder we find it hard sometimes to say that. The prayer teaches us not merely to submit to God's will, but to desire that God's will may take place in the world; that everything concerning us and concerning all around us may happen according to his will. And if he takes away our property, our health, our usefulness, our life, or some one we love better than our life, still we would say and we should rejoice when we say, "Thy will be done." Oh, if it could be so; if in the world, whether gaining or losing, in success or failure, it could be so, in us and about us, that God's will were done in all things-what a joy in the thought; what a springing gladness it puts into the heart, the very idea!

II. But perhaps we shall find, not more important but more practical lessons if we turn to the second part of the prayer, which contains petitions relating to ourselves.

1. First: "Give us this day our daily bread." Now I entreat you, don't listen to the commentaries, so many of which tell you that this means spiritual bread. I am weary of that everlasting spiritualizing. Spiritual things are far above temporal things, but there are many references in the Scriptures to our temporal and material wants, and why should we lose their meaning, and sustaining power, because we go on allegorizing everything. It is plainly a prayer for temporal good, as represented by that which is most essential, and thus stated in the simplest possible form; and a prayer with reference simply to day after day. A little child sees its meaning and feels its sweetness, and the wisest man can find no higher wisdom than to cry still: "Give us this day our daily bread."

My brethren, I should be inclined to think that above all the petitions of the prayer this needs to be enforced in our time. I have known some Christians who were very unwilling to realize that there was any human exertion in obtaining spiritual good. They say, if that be true, how is it the gift of God? And if it be the gift of God, how can it be the effort of our own labor? Yet if spiritual good is the gift of God, so is temporal good the gift of God, though it is obtained only by human effort. The truth is, we see, that both are the gift of God, and both are the result of our own exertions.

Especially with reference to one of the great tendencies of thought in our time is it important that we should cherish this petition for our daily bread. "Pshaw!" men say, "that depends upon physical forces and

laws; upon material things; upon your own exertion, man; upon the climate and the weather." Now in the face of these notions it becomes all the more appropriate that we should pray to God to give us daily bread. Yes, and I tell you plainly and boldly, though I have not time to develop the thought, if it is not right and wise to ask God for daily bread, if as they tell you in the newspapers so often, there is no efficacy in prayer, there is no use in praying for rain, then there is no God at all. You are driven straight to it by absolute logical necessity. If it is not proper to pray for daily bread and to pray for rain, there is no God; there is nothing in existence but matter, with its organization and its results. You cannot help it; there is no standing room, for the life of you, between those two positions. Alas, alas, how many in our time, one-sided or superficial, have gone into utter materialism. Never was there a time when it was more needful that the Christian world should realize in their experience the sentiment of this prayer. We work for daily bread, and we plan for years to come, but none the less are we to seek it as the daily gift of the daily goodness of our Father in heaven.

2. "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." The simple prayer for temporal things all embraced in that one petition for what is most indispensable, and now in addition, a twofold prayer-forgiveness for past sin, and deliverance from sin in the future. That our God may be glorified; that our earthly wants may be supplied, and that we may be forgiven our sin, and delivered from evil-that is all there is to pray for.

You know that the term "debt" is used here as an Aramaic expression to denote sin-sin regarded as a debt, which we must pay to God, or in the kindred phrase of other languages, "pay the penalty." You notice that when our Lord repeats the thought a moment later he says trespasses, or transgressions. You remember that when he gives the prayer on a subsequent occasion it is: "Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us." "Forgive us our debts" means, forgive us our sins. My friends, does it ever occur to you that you are more anxious about the "give" than the "forgive"? Does it ever happen in your experience that you pray that God would give and forget to ask that God would forgive? And yet, is not this last as deep a need? Yea, a deeper need than the other? Ah! that a man should have all earthly things given him, and his sins not forgiven, would be a poor gift. Yet a man who should be deprived of all earthly things and go starving into the other world, yet with his sins forgiven, would be rich and might rejoice. Let us not forget as we go on praying for what God has to give, to ask still more earnestly that he would forgive us our sins.

I must beg you in connection with the prayer to dwell upon the condition which our Lord here presents. It is a matter of the utmost practical importance to all of us. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." You have noticed surely, that after completing this simple prayer, Jesus before going on to speak of other things, takes up again one of the thoughts of the prayer; and which one is it? Something about God's name being hallowed, or his reign coming? Something about daily bread? Something about temptation, or evil? Nay: it is this one; this one thought he repeats, repeats it positively and negatively. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you, and if you forgive not, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive you. You know why-you know yourself but little if you do not well know why he dwells upon this. The disposition to be revengeful, or at any rate to be unforgiving, is one of the deepest rooted, one of the hardest to correct, one of the most hurtful and ruinous in its influence, of all the evil dispositions that belong to our sinful human nature. So our Lord presents forgiving as the condition of being forgiven, the condition sine qua non-if we do not forgive men we cannot be forgiven. He does not mean that our forgiving in the meritorious ground of our being forgiven. It is an indispensable condition. Only if we do forgive men can we be forgiven, but then we are forgiven on the ground which the gospel

provides-the merit which is not our own.

Now let us make a practical distinction. We use that word "forgive" in a somewhat ambiguous fashion. In the strict and proper sense it is not our duty to forgive a man unless he repents. God forgives in that sense no man but the penitent, and Jesus said, you remember: "If thy brother sin against thee seven times in the day and seven times in the day turn saying, 'I repent,' thou shalt forgive him." It is not right that you should restore a man to the confidence he has forfeited, unless he shows himself worthy of it. It is not right that you should forgive a man, in the full sense of the term, unless he repents; not only is it not your duty, but it is not right. "Love your enemies, that ye may be sons of your Father in heaven." God forgives only the penitent, and loves them as his friends, but even the impenitent God loves. "He makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust." He wishes his enemies no harm, but does them good. We need not, and really should not, forgive a man in the full sense while he remains impenitent, but we must in the other sense forgive him. We must bear him no malice. We must do him no harm. We must be glad to do him good, in anything that will not promote his evil designs against us. Thus shall we be the sons of our Father in heaven.

I think this distinction is practically important. The idea of forgiving a man who is impenitent does seem to be impracticable, and that is not what the Scriptures teach; but that we should bear no malice and yield to no revenge, that is what the Scriptures teach. Ah me, even this is hard enough for poor human nature! Let us strive to do that; let us lay it to heart. Who is there here today among us who has not sometimes thought himself to have been cruelly wronged? Who? We all have need then to exercise this forgiveness.

3. And finally, "bring us not into temptation." For it is not simply lead it is bring. Human agency is, for the moment, here left out of account. The thought is, of God's providence as bearing us on, and bringing us into certain situations, and the prayer is that God will not bring us into circumstances of temptation of trial. Why? Because we are afraid we cannot stand temptation. Ah, every man that knows himself will most certainly feel an echo in his heart, "I am weak, O Lord bring me not into temptation."

A man advertised for a coachman, and when the applicants came, he asked each one, "How near would you undertake to run my carriage wheel to the edge of a precipice?" The first one said he would run within a foot of it. The second said he would run within six inches. The third was an Irishman, who said, "I would kape away as far as I could,"-and he got the place. Maybe you will remember that, if you forget my solemn injunction. O my Christian friends, pray that you may be kept away from temptation, for you are weak, and let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.

"Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." My brethren, this simple prayer ought as a model to control all our praying. Its spirit ought to strike into our blood, shaping our whole character, regulating our whole life. And as we pray it, oh, ought not our life's endeavor to accord with it? What folly to pray, "Thy reign come," and never a finger lifted to urge forward the progress of that reign; never a sacrifice made, never deed done, nor word spoken, nought but idle prayer. What folly to pray for forgiveness of sin, and pray for deliverance from evil, if along with the prayer there be not the cherished desire after holiness, and the perpetual effort to abhor-to abhor-that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good.

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