

## Grace to Live – Pray Like This

Matthew 6:9-15 | Sunday, September 30, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

# GRACE TO LIVE PRAY LIKE THIS Matthew 6:9-15

Pray then like this:  
“Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day 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 evil.

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Today we are looking at the topic of prayer, really how to pray. Jesus teaches us how to pray by giving us a model prayer. We call it The Lord’s Prayer, but we might do better to call it The Model Prayer, given to us by Jesus himself. He tells us to pray like this.

He has already been teaching on the subject of prayer and he lumps three areas together -- giving, praying and fasting - with the belief, the assumption that as his followers we will do these things. They will be a part of our following of Jesus Christ. The reality is that many of us find it difficult to pray. We don’t know how to pray. We lack the ability to pray. We struggle to pray, so this is a very helpful message.

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At the beginning here I want to recommend a resource. Over the years I have recommended a lot of resources and sometimes they are very, very helpful. I tend to read classic Christian books and sometimes they are hundreds of years old. You come back and say, “Brian, that was great, but I really didn’t understand it.” So I’ve been on a mission to find a very accessible, clear, practical, and yet sound resource to help you pray. I am recommending a book by John Ortberg, [The Life You’ve Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People](#). We have a few copies of this at the bookstore, or you can get it online. I recommend this to you. You may find the chapter on prayer most helpful, or the chapter that teaches you how to slow down and not be so busy, or the chapter helping you overcome approval addiction, or the chapter on celebration and joy. Different chapters are going to speak to you in different ways. It’s a helpful resource. In fact, it’s the right length and it has study notes in the back for small groups, so next semester you might want to go through that resource in a small group setting. It would be great to have a couple people lead that.

So, we’re going to talk about prayer. I’m going to give you three summary points of this model prayer. We’re going to talk about the power of prayer, the heart of prayer, and the growth of prayer. Let’s jump in with the power of prayer.

### I. The Power of Prayer.

The power of prayer is grace. We are actually going to start at the end of the passage, where Jesus concludes. This is really the most difficult part of the prayer that Jesus gives us. It’s actually an explanation of something in the prayer, where Jesus states: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” These two verses are difficult for us, because it sounds like we are earning our standing with God, our position with God, our access to God, and that we have to do something in order to be heard by God.

We know from scripture that we don’t relate to God based on our works. We are unable to connect with God based on what we do. We sang today, “God with us, God for us.” I just gave a brief prayer, an exhortation after that time of worship, saying if you don’t feel that, let me remind you that we come before God by grace and he offers mercy to us. That’s the message of the Bible.

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So, what is Jesus doing here? What is he teaching here? Most commentators agree that there is an implication that's really clear when you step back and think about it. Jesus is saying to us, "If you are at all in touch with your sin and the seriousness of that sin and the death it brings, the consequence of it..." I know that the whole idea of sin is an unpopular concept for us, but that's clearly the teaching of scripture. We have a broken relationship with God and scripture has a word for this. We have sinned against God and against one another.

One of the things that happens is, not only by the Spirit of God working on our hearts do we begin to get a sense of sin, its seriousness, the death it brings, the consequence, but we taste the destruction that it brings to the things that are most precious in our lives. We taste the way it hurts the people that we love the most. We see how even in religion and worship, sin gets in and twists it.

There are times when, if you are a follower of Jesus, you feel like, "I can't get past this sin! I'm powerless! I must not even be saved!" Jesus is saying, "If you really get it, then you hear the message of scripture that says you are forgiven, you don't do a single thing, it is God's gift, it is mercy." In fact, because God is just and he requires payment, he pays it. Listen to this: He pays it himself in the person of his Son. His Son suffers for you. His Son suffers in your place. It's mercy.

One of the ways it comes home to me is as a father of six. When I have seen my sin scar my children, I could step back and say, "Praise God, my sin doesn't define them. God's grace is greater than the stronghold and the cycle of my own sin and inability." If that isn't good news to you, I can't help you. Because for me, my wife, my children and this church – they are most precious. I think sometimes I would be overcome with grief or with a sense of my own weakness if I couldn't believe God is greater than me. There is this amazing resurrection hope that fills us.

Jesus is saying, "If you experience that, it is simply unthinkable to leave that and go away and say, 'I don't forgive you. You know what? You've offended me and I refuse to grant you forgiveness.'" I think it works a little bit like this. When we are over here saying, "I will not forgive you," then our prayer before God is not reliant on his grace. It's reliant on our own goodness. We are saying, "I'm good enough that I don't really need God's mercy because I feel like I can withhold it from you. It's not necessarily an exchange as much as an evidence that we have not related to God based on grace.

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We're not even to the good point yet, because this is where power comes from. This is where power in prayer comes from. It comes from this place where you come before the Lord, and you start to pray, and you are distracted. In fact, you are in some kind of fantasy of how much you hate someone and you are just making them pay in the fantasy. Oh, don't act like you've never done that. Don't act like I'm the only one. Ortberg talks about success fantasies, these vendetta, vindictive fantasies, where we go through these cycles in our minds of how we just put someone in their place.

Here you are. You're praying to God. Then you feel like, "Who am I? Why am I praying? I can't pray. I'm so unworthy. I'm unholy. I'm hateful." Ah, no, no, no. It's grace. It doesn't make okay what we're doing, but there's power when we say, "I come in the name of Jesus, in the power of the cross of Jesus." It's powerful.

Let me end this first point by calling attention to the obvious. I'm saying to you it's basically an evidence that we are relating to God by grace. I think that's correct. But Jesus phrases it like it's a cause. It's a cause and effect. It's the effect, it's the result of understanding grace. But he says it in a way where it sounds like he's saying if you don't forgive, you won't be forgiven. And I think that's true, because you are not relating to God by grace.

Let's just ask this question: Why would Jesus phrase it as a cause? This is a teaching method that Jesus uses throughout the whole Sermon on the Mount. It's very cutting edge. It's very direct. It's very narrow. I think that even when we start with God by grace, even when we understand grace, even when we relate to God by grace, we don't connect our unforgiveness to the grace we've received. We fail to make that obvious connection. We sometimes struggle with wanting to extract judgment. We want to make people pay, understandably, because sometimes the sin that's been done against us is very, very serious.

Scripture tells us that there is a process, and it may not be a quick process, depending on what we are dealing with. But we must come to the place where we release it to God, because God alone is just, and he will take care of it. Rest assured, people. Listen, we are embroiled in a battle in this country. There are all kinds of accusations and denials and accusations. One day it will all be clear. One day. I don't know. You don't know. But one day it will be clear.

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That doesn't mean we don't pursue justice now, but rest assured. That should scare you, because one day it's not going to be a focus in Washington, DC -- I'm going to be standing in the lights, and I want to be able to say in that moment: Jesus is my hope.

So why does Jesus put it out there as a cause? Because sometimes I just don't do it. He gives me this warning so that it will do what? It will send me back to get grace. I will say, "Lord, I'm mad and I want to stay mad. Because it feels good right now to be mad. And not only do I want to be mad, I want to extract some payment. Lord, I need grace. Forgive me. Help me. I am unable." I do think it is cause and effect, both connecting to grace.

Let's move on to #2.

### II. The Heart of Prayer.

The heart of prayer is asking. Most of the prayer is a series of requests that are presented to God. In fact, almost the entire prayer, except for the first address, is a series of requests asking God to do something. "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done." We are asking God to even bring about praise, to bring about in me and in others his kingdom, his will. We are asking for the forgiveness of sin. We are asking for the provision of our daily needs. We are asking for the protection from evil and from sin, both within and without. Those are the things that we are bringing before God.

When I had started pastoring here and my wife and I found ourselves in a crisis in our marriage, there was a parallel crisis that I experienced, because I was not really praying very much. I was not consistently spending time with God in prayer and God's word, what we would call spiritual disciplines. I was trying, but I just was failing. So if you're here and you say, "I have trouble, failing at reading my Bible," be encouraged. I was a pastor and I was having trouble. I don't want you to stay there. That's why I want to tell you this story.

So, the crisis of our lives accentuated the need to pray. It wasn't like, "Okay, wow, I've got to pray now because only God can do this." I mean, that was true. But it was more the brokenness that I began to experience, because of the failure that my wife and I were experiencing. In a way like

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never before, I was experiencing the fruit of my own pride and anger. There was a brokenness that God was just beginning...and all my friends and family who know me well would say, “Hey, pal, you’re not there yet.” I get that. I totally agree.

But there was a profound moment that happened. Here was the connection. In prayer I was saying, “God, I’m such a mess! Not only am I hurting my wife and failing as a husband, blaming her...” Now, if she had the mike, she would want to tell you, “That’s not entirely true. Actually, he’s a great guy.” She would want to give all of these qualifiers and talk about her own failure and sin, I’m sure. This is truly my perspective, friends.

Then there was this thing: “You’re a pastor and you don’t even pray.” That’s shameful. Now, guys, I prayed. But not like I knew I wanted to and needed to. You know what I did? Here’s the solution. I’m going to give you the secret. Are you ready? I told God, and I asked him to help me. I asked God to help me pray, and I wrote it in my journal over and over and over. “I’m ashamed. Obviously, there is a failure to believe, a failure to focus, a failure to see my sin, a failure to see my need. I’m doing this on my own.” And you know what God did? God gloriously answered that prayer. Really. It’s his grace.

My wife would tell you today that she is experiencing marital bliss. Okay, maybe not. But she would tell you that by God’s grace this has become a strength in my life. If that sounds like boasting, I’m telling you, God did it. The heart of prayer is a disposition of receiving, even when I’m praising him. Some teachers would say, “You know, as you mature in your faith, you move away from asking for things for yourself and more into praise and thanksgiving.” I think that that’s true, but I think there are two things you need to explain that.

One is: I think that’s true because you are growing more in heavenly things and are more and more detached from this world -- spiritual growth. But, this is very important, I think. When we are praising God, we are still in a disposition of receiving. “Hallowed be thy name. Lord, help me to praise you. May your name, may your reputation, may who you are, your attributes be treated as holy.” I’m really praying not to take the Lord’s name in an empty fashion. I’m praying for God to be revered in my life and around me, and I’m seeing that I need God’s grace to do that. So the heart of prayer is asking.

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In case we need a little more evidence, let's look at the previous two verses, verses 7 and 8. I didn't read them today. But when Jesus begins teaching us on prayer he says, "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words." Listen to this phrase: "Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." You see, the emphasis, the assumption on the part of Jesus is that you are asking, and that God even knows what you need before you show up knocking at his door.

Let me quickly give you a summary of what those petitions represent:

- Praise. We are praying for God to be praised, to be adored, to be glorified, for his kingdom to come, for his will to be done.
- We are praying personal requests and confessions. We are praying for protection, for provision, for help within and without.
- Then we are praying for others. This is the part where we are praying for God's will to be done, God's kingdom to come. We call this intercessory prayer.

Truthfully, there is a real emphasis in scripture in kind of a descending order here of praise, personal requests, confession, and prayer for others. And the more we grow in the Lord the more we are praying for others as we experience maturity.

Let's go to the final point.

### III. The Growth of Prayer.

The growth of prayer is mission. Jesus tells us to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." We've already noted this throughout our study of The Sermon on the Mount, the theme is really the kingdom of God. In fact, the theme of this entire section all the way through the end of Matthew chapter 9 is the reign of God. We want to see God rule. We want to see Jesus exalted. We are praying for the mission, for the kingdom to impact more lives. And this, I want to suggest to you, is where real personal growth begins to accelerate in our lives. As we start saying, "Okay, I'm surrendering my will to you, God. I

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want this. I want this really bad. I'm pouring out my heart," it is very appropriate that we do that. Wherever we are, that's where we start.

In fact, let me just say this right now as a parenthesis. Sometimes one of the things that keeps us from praying is the feeling that our prayers aren't very spiritual. You know, "I'm praying for this need and that thing and that concern." I think you have no choice but to start with what's preoccupying your mind and heart, and that's where you begin with God. You pour your heart out to God. As you do that, if you practice what the scripture tells us, you do it consistently, you keep pouring out your heart to God, God does something wonderful. You find out: "He's answering my prayer, but he's shaping my heart in the meantime. He's bringing me to a place where I begin to yield to him and I realize something. There is a truth that begins to build momentum and faith -- that true happiness is found not in my kingdom, but in his kingdom. And joy is found when he is glorified, not when I get my way."

I used to tell you about how years ago, when I was a sophomore in high school I had a crush on this girl. She was nothing, just nothing. I prayed to marry her. I did. "God, I want to marry her." When one of our boys was six years old he took an assessment test. When he came out we asked, "How did it go?" "There was this girl in front of me and she had the most beautiful hair." That's so sweet, right? Now when I look back at my sophomore year I feel like my son when he was six. I had no idea what God had for me. Sorry to embarrass you all with this personal reflection.

I think we pour out our hearts to God, but we learn that life is better in the kingdom of God. When we adopted Joshua and Caleb from Africa, we tried to adopt a little girl from a neighboring country. My daughter had her heart set on this. I still remember -- she had her picture up on her mirror. I went to both countries in Africa, and when I tried to adopt this little girl, the director of the orphanage blocked me. He said no. Then there were complicating factors and I just knew it wasn't God. When I came back, this news to my daughter was so devastating. She literally said something like this: "You're telling me I have three brothers, and now there are going to be five. I just want one sister." And there were tears.

I did something that I don't recommend you do. I gave her her life verse. I'm her dad, I figured it's my authority. "This is your verse for the rest of your life." She has probably moved on, but she still has this Post-it. "Humble yourself under the mighty hand of the Lord and in due season he will exalt

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you.” There is a place where we surrender to God. “I will accept that I am the only girl in this family.” Now she loves it. She still complains that when birthdays come around, she’s the one that has to get all the boys moving and in action. There is a place where you learn to delight in the call of God on your life. Jesus models it for us in the Garden of Gethsemane. I’m going to leave off with this and say to us that there is this amazing opportunity that God gives us in prayer.

I will close with this little story of something I experienced while I was on this spiritual retreat. I woke up in the middle of the night, about 1:30. I was in the mountains in Colorado and I couldn’t sleep. In fact, I never went back to sleep that night. After a little while of being awake, I had this amazing awareness of the presence of the Lord. I just knew I wasn’t alone. Now, there was no voice. There was no mystical experience. I just knew in my heart. It was so strong that I kept sitting up in bed, looking for who was there.

You’re thinking, “I knew he was crazy. I knew there was something off with this guy.” But it’s true. This is really what I was experiencing. So, as I was resting I started praying, and I felt like the Lord spoke this so clearly in my heart. It was just an impression. It was, “I dwell in you. You are my dwelling place. That’s my plan for the ages. I dwell in my people.”

Eventually I got up and went about my morning. I went into this little town and sat in a coffee shop with a little creek running by. I was reading and praying, and again the Lord spoke to me, this time through a book I was reading on Jacob at Bethel. Jacob has an encounter with God at Bethel and he makes this statement: “God was in this place and I didn’t know it.” This is what I felt the Lord was saying to me: “I’m in you and you didn’t know it. You are living unaware of my presence.” The word Bethel means “house of God.” Then God just spoke lovingly as a Father: “You are Bethel. You are the house of God. I dwell in you.”

Prayer is our opportunity to commune with God. And when we lack the ability to do it, we just knock on the Father’s door and say, “Please help.” He invites you today to do that.