

Lesson 96—January 3, 2016

The Lord's Prayer (Part 1)

Scripture: Matthew 6:9-13 (key verse—9)

Lesson Goal: To gain a better understanding of The Lord's Prayer.

Introduction: The prayer recorded in Matthew 6:9-13, and in shorter, slightly different form in Luke 11:2-4, is commonly referred to as “The Lord's Prayer.” It has also been labeled “The Disciples' Prayer” and “The Model Prayer.”

Having grown up in church, sometime during my childhood or teen years I memorized what we call “The Lord's Prayer.” My first true recollection of repeating this prayer in a group setting took place when I was in high school back in the early 1970s. Every Friday night during football season, our coaches and players joined together to recite its words. This was the last thing we did before entering the stadium. Way back then, it seemed every coach and every player knew the words of this prayer. We may not have known its meaning or the theological significance of its words, but we could repeat it together.

Now please take a moment and count the number of singular pronouns in the prayer. How many did you count? What does this suggest about The Lord's Prayer?

(V9) Before Jesus actually prayed the prayer recorded in verses 9-13, He began with a very brief word of introduction and instruction: “In this manner, therefore, pray.” He offered this prayer in contrast to the prayers and lifestyle presented by the Pharisees and scribes (see Matthew 6:1-7).

As followers of Jesus Christ, how important is prayer in our daily lives?

The phrase “in this manner” helps us to understand that Jesus did not say that each time we pray we must use these exact words. Indeed, He warned His followers about using vain repetitions as they pray (V7). Dr. Robert A. Cook offers an interesting word: “All of us have one routine prayer in our system; and once we get rid of it, then we can really start to pray!” Warren Wiersbe adds: “With some people, praying is like putting the needle on a phonograph record and then forgetting about it.” Jesus offered the prayer of verses 9-13 in direct contrast to repetitive self-glorifying prayer.

“In this manner” (Greek—“*Houtōs oun*),” literally means “in the following manner, thus therefore, along these lines.” Jesus did not give the words that followed to be used in a vain repetitious, ritualistic manner, whether alone or in a group setting. “In this manner” helps us to understand that prayer consists of many elements, such as adoration, praise, thanksgiving, exaltation, worship and forgiveness. “In this manner” simply means to pray in this way; it does *not* mean to pray only using these words. Prayer should never be reduced to an empty recitation where words become meaningless.

As we pray, how can our words become meaningless?

No prayer should ever be mechanically-repeated words that become void of meaning and sincerity. Jesus offers His followers instruction to guide us in how to pray, as well as how *not* to pray.

(V9) “Our Father in heaven”—This prayer begins with the word “our,” so we are to understand that this prayer can be used corporately, although the manner of it, or the *how* of it, certainly pertains to private and personal prayer as well. It is a wonderful blessing to be part of God’s family, so as the family of God, we would do well to understand “that we must pray not only alone and for ourselves, but with and for others; for we are members one of another, and are called into fellowship with each other” (Henry).

“Father” Greek—“*Patēr*” which is often rendered “*Abba*” in Aramaic (the language which Jesus and most Palestinian Jews commonly spoke). “*Abba*” is equivalent to our word “daddy” and carries a more intimate and personal connotation than *Patēr*.

As a believer, what does it mean to you to be able to speak of God as “Father”? Please answer prayerfully.

John Phillips offers these very practical words:

We should begin by showing appreciation for God’s person: “Our Father in heaven.” That’s the address on the envelope, so to speak, and what an intimate and comforting address it is. We address our prayer to our Father. The greatest name for God in the Old Testament is Jehovah—the God of covenant who makes “exceeding great and precious promises” to His people and keeps those promises. But the greatest name of all for God is our “Father,” a name that implies relationship, resources and responsibilities beyond “all that we ask or think.”

We may use the name Father for God, but there must never be careless familiarity. God’s name must not be used in a casual, flippant manner.

What are some examples of using God’s name in a flippant disrespectful way?

“Hallowed be Your name”—to hallow God’s name is to revere, honor, glorify, and obey Him. To hallow the name of God is to give the greatest respect to His name.

How can a person disrespect the name of God?

Something very important to think about: For followers of Jesus Christ to live in disobedience to God is to take His name in vain or to disrespect the hallowedness of His name. Our disobedience brings dishonor to the name of God.

Why is it important that we honor the name of God?

What are some ways we honor the name of God?

The *Life Application Bible Commentary* helps us to understand these verses:

The phrase “our Father in heaven” indicates that God is majestic and holy; He transcends everything on earth. But He is also personal and loving. The first line of this model prayer is a statement of praise and a commitment to “hallow,” or honor, God’s holy name. Christians, who bear the holy name of Christ, must be responsible to hallow him in every aspect of their lives. These words remind us that God wants to hear and listen as a loving Father, but that coming to Him is an awesome privilege. We must enter the King’s throne room respectfully.

God’s name hallowed means that His name is set apart and different from all other names. As we pray, we should recognize the holiness of God represented by His name.

How do we disrespect the name of God by the praise and honor we give to athletes, actors, musicians, and politicians?

Please answer today’s final questions prayerfully and with honor to His name.

As Christians, we name the name of Christ; how are we honoring His name by our actions, attitudes, speech, integrity, pureness of heart and worship?

How did we honor His name by studying this lesson?

Lesson 97—January 10, 2016

The Lord’s Prayer (Part 2)

Scripture: Matthew 6:9-15

Lesson Goal: To learn of and better understand the meaning of Jesus’ words concerning the prayer of Matthew 6:9-13.

Introduction: Over and over in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus emphasizes the purity of the true believer’s heart. He speaks of “the pure in heart” in direct contrast to the outward showmanship displayed by the scribes and Pharisees. He wants His followers to understand that no amount of outward display of seemingly religious piousness can ever take the place of a pure heart.

As followers of Jesus, one example or test of a pure heart is to simply ask ourselves: “Why do I do what I do?” This simple question becomes a self-examination and evaluation to help us understand the purity of our motives. Our motives are a great litmus test of the purity found in our hearts. Most of us remember, or understand, the little strip of paper known as an acid base indicator. The paper turns red in acid solutions

and blue in alkaline solutions. Our hearts' motives are a great litmus test for the purity of our hearts. Let's look at a couple of examples.

Example 1

If I see a stranger who needs my help and I respond to help this person, but I only do it because I think someone may notice and write an article in the paper about my actions, what do my motives say about the purity of my heart?

Example 2

If God places on my heart to personally help someone financially, but the following Sunday I announce to all my *Life Focus* class that I helped, what does this say about the purity of my heart and my motives for helping?

In last week's lesson, we studied the importance of honoring God's name. We are to honor His name as we pray: "hallowed by Your name." We are also to honor His name by the way we live our lives. The motives of our hearts should be a testimony of our love and honor for His great name. Today, we look at the remaining words of the Lord's Prayer, beginning with verse 10.

(V10) "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

To pray for God's "kingdom come" is to pray for the advancement of His cause. It is to pray for the eternal purposes of God to be fulfilled. Our prayer is for God to rule and reign in the hearts of mankind. To pray "Your kingdom come" is to pray for Christ to come and reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

(V11) "Give us this day our daily bread."

Bread not only represents food but is symbolic of all our physical needs. John Stott offers: "To Martin Luther, everything necessary for the preservation of this life is bread."

The emphasis of verse 11 is a reminder that as we pray we acknowledge our dependence on God for the daily needs of our lives.

Does our knowledge and understanding of God's provision for our daily lives relinquish us from any responsibility in His plan of provision for our lives? Please explain your answer.

Again I remind each of us that in God's provision He provides food for the birds, but He doesn't throw it into the nest. How does this simple truth relate to us as followers of Jesus Christ?

(V12) "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

This does not refer to judicial forgiveness from the penalty of sin, which is obtained by faith in the Son of God. Rather, this refers to the forgiveness necessary if fellowship with our Father is to be maintained. If believers are unwilling to forgive those who wrong them, how can they expect to have fellowship with the Father who has forgiven them for their wrongdoings?

What is the most important fact we (true believers) must keep in mind if we are having trouble extending forgiveness to others? We must understand the wonderful forgiveness God extended to us through Christ Jesus. As we better understand our own forgiveness by God, we are able to then show forth forgiveness to others. Jesus warns of the selfishness of those who seek God's forgiveness yet willingly refuse to extend forgiveness to others.

Pastor's Word of Testimony

Through the years, as both a student and teacher of God's Word, I have learned that one of the most difficult truths for followers of Jesus to understand and comprehend is the wonderful forgiveness of God. We may know the Scripture passages which deal with the subject of forgiveness; we may be able to sing songs or choruses that speak to the truth of God's forgiveness; but to truly understand the *Hallelujah* fact that we, sinners, can receive the forgiveness of Almighty God doesn't totally compute with most of us. If followers of Jesus could truly grasp the power and meaning of this great truth, we would have greater strength to forgive those who have sinned against us.

What does it mean to be forgiven by God?

Why is it easier for us to receive God's forgiveness than to extend forgiveness to others?

(V13) "And do not lead us into temptation. But deliver us from the evil one."

First we must speak to that which is often misunderstood about this verse. The truth of Scripture is that God does not lead us into temptation. He tempts no one (see James 1:13). God does not lead us to sin. Here, Jesus is instructing us that as we pray, we should pray that God will keep us from the pull of temptation.

As we ask in prayer that God would keep us from the pull of temptation, what becomes our part in overcoming this pull?

"But deliver us from the evil one"

Pray that God will guard against, rescue, and preserve us from the deceptive evil one, the master of deceit, who is seeking to destroy us.

What are some things in your life that you need to ask God to guard against or protect you from?

(V13) "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." The prayer closes with praise and worship to God.

"Amen"—so be it!

(VV14-15) With His insight and commentary, Jesus concludes this portion on prayer. We should forgive others based upon the fact that we have been forgiven. We have received the blessed judicial forgiveness of God (see Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 2:1-2). We cannot know the parental forgiveness of the Father, which enables and keeps fellowship with Him, apart from our forgiving others.

Interesting thought

“Forgive”—Greek *aphiēmi* means to “hurl away.”

As followers of Christ, God’s wonderful blessing of forgiveness has been extended to us. But if we fail to extend forgiveness to others and harbor a bitter spirit of un-forgiveness, our actions are totally inconsistent with being a true follower of Jesus.

Please read Matthew 18:21-35.

Lesson 98—January 17, 2016

Look How Spiritual I Can Be

Scripture: Matthew 6:16-18

Lesson Goal: To gain an understanding of Jesus’ teaching on the subject of fasting with a pure heart.

Introduction: We have looked at two of the three areas of practical righteousness which Jesus spoke of in Matthew 6:1-15—giving (charitable deeds) in verses 1-4, and prayer in verses 5-16. Today we look at fasting—the third specific subject of practical righteousness. Jesus gives His followers the correct manner in which giving, prayer and fasting are to be done, as opposed to the hypocritical religious practices of the Pharisees. Jesus’ authority calls for His followers to be different from the Pharisees in life and practice.

How are Jesus’ followers to be different from the Pharisees and scribes? List and explain some of these differences.

(V16) The word “moreover” refers to what follows. In this context, it is the subject of fasting.

Before we move into the specific instructions concerning fasting, it may be helpful to briefly look at the definition of fasting. John Stott explains:

Strictly speaking, [fasting] is a total abstention from food. It can be legitimately extended, however, to mean going without food partially or totally, for shorter or longer periods. Hence, of course the naming of each day’s first meal as breakfast, since at it we “break our fast” of the night period during which we ate nothing. There is no doubt in Scripture that fasting has to do, in various ways, with self-denial and self-discipline.

John MacArthur adds:

Legitimate fasting always has a spiritual purpose and is never presented as having any value in and of itself. During Old Testament times, many faithful believers fasted—Moses, Samson, Samuel, Hannah, David, Elijah, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, and others. The New Testament tells of the fasting of Anna, John the Baptist and his disciples, Jesus, Paul and others. But the only fast commanded in Scripture is the one connected with the Jewish Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16:29, 23:27).

Although fasting was not explicitly commanded for the followers of Jesus, it is not wrong to fast, if done in the right way with pure motives. Fasting must be done in devotion to God and worship of Him.

(V16) “when you fast”—It is taken for granted in the Sermon on the Mount that we, followers of Jesus, *will* fast.

“do not be like the hypocrites”—The word “Pharisee” literally means “pretender.” Once again Jesus instructs His followers on how *not* to fast (as the Pharisees), but also on how *to* fast. The Pharisees fasted each Monday and Thursday (see Luke 18:12) and did so in such a way that people knew they were fasting. The purpose of their fasting was to gain the attention of men, and in so doing to make themselves appear impressive before men. The fact is our fasting should be done differently than the Pharisees who called attention to themselves giving the appearance of spirituality “with a sad countenance.”

When we serve Jesus, do we want people to notice us? This question does not speak of a godly witness to the lost, but to the need for selfish recognition by others. The Pharisees desired to be seen by men.

As already stated, the Pharisees fasted two days of the week.

This was done because they believed that on these days Moses made the two separate trips to receive the tablets of law from God on Mount Sinai. But those two days also happened to be the major Jewish market days when cities or towns were crowded with farmers, merchants and shoppers. They were, therefore, the two days where public fasting would have the largest audiences (MacArthur).

In order to be recognized by people, the Pharisees called attention to their fasting with gloomy facial expressions. To make sure they were noticed, they wore old clothes, not their daily wardrobe. Often, they purposely covered themselves with ashes. All of this was done “that they may appear to men to be fasting.” They give the appearance that they are fasting, but God knows the heart. This fasting, exemplified by the Pharisees (hypocrites), may seem impressive to men but has no spiritual significance. This fasting is approved only by men and not by God. All that is gained is the applause of men. Heaven is not impressed.

Christians, followers of Jesus, must examine the purity of their own hearts by constantly asking themselves: Why am I doing what I am doing?

What is the difference between pride and humility? Please explain your answer.

(V17) “But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face” Jesus very directly addresses His instruction to His followers, “But *you*...”

“When you fast,” you should not be like the Pharisees in manner or motive. In manner, you are not to put on the garments or the facial expressions that become a sign of your fast. You are not to take the position of an “ash wearer.” In motive, you are not to pronounce a fast in order to draw men’s attention to yourself. Appearing spiritual to impress others is not the purpose of a true fast.

In contrast to those things the Pharisees do, you “anoint your head and wash your face.”

As with almsgiving and prayer, those who fast must not advertise their piety by visible signs of suffering and deprivation. Otherwise a person again gains accolades from people rather than from God. Instead people must groom themselves according to their cultural norms in order to appear joyful and content (Bloomberg).

Basically, Jesus instructs that we, as His followers, when fasting should not change ourselves (our appearance) from that of our daily norm or routine of life. We should not broadcast our fast to others in a way to draw attention to ourselves. In fact, Jesus makes this very clear in the final verse of this section.

(V18) “so that you do not appear to men to be fasting”

In a true and pure fast, the majority of the multitudes will not observe any appearance of a fast.

Please read Matthew 6:4, 6, and 18.

What is the common thread woven throughout these verses?

What is the important biblical truth presented in these verses?

As we close this section, I want to share some thoughts, found in both the Old and New Testaments, concerning biblical fasting.

1. “When you fast” helps us to understand that fasting is biblical for us even today. There are certain times and occasions when fasting is certainly acceptable *and* needed.
2. As I previously mentioned, the only direct command for fasting was for the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament. When Jesus, the Lamb of God, became the once-for-all sacrifice on the cross (see Hebrews 10:10), that prescribed occasion for fasting (the Day of Atonement) ceased to exist.
3. Please read Matthew 9:14-15. The question was asked by John the Baptist’s disciples concerning Jesus’ disciples: “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?” Jesus’ response to them was in the context of “mourning, or other times of consuming spiritual need or anxiety” (MacArthur).
4. Fasting is often associated with mourning and is appropriate and acceptable during times of sorrow (2 Samuel 12:16; 2 Samuel 3:35).
5. Fasting is a proper and appropriate response in times of danger (2 Chronicles 20:3; Esther 4:16; Ezra 8:21-23).

6. Fasting is often associated with brokenness over one's own sin (1 King 21:27; Jonah 3:5 and 7).
7. Fasting is a natural accompaniment for the one who is desperately and honestly seeking the will of God (Daniel 9:2-3; 9:21-22; 10:3).
8. Fasting was done before an important task or ministry was undertaken. Can you remember a time in Jesus' life when this was the case? On another occasion, the early church responded by fasting (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23).

The last important truth I share with you today is the fact that fasting and praying are linked together. We can certainly pray without fasting, but we cannot fast without praying. Fasting is truly taking prayer to the gut level. Fasting is always done in the biblical sense with a pure heart. Without purity of heart, fasting is just another vain action.

Please read Zechariah 7 verses 5, 9, and 10. What is the lesson of these verses?

Lesson 99—January 24, 2016

Investing Eternally

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-21

Lesson Goal: To better understand Jesus' words concerning heavenly investments.

Introduction: Jesus is about to share with His followers how they can truly find security in the future. As we move into this section of His teaching on the Sermon on the Mount, I believe it would be beneficial to understand some simple, basic truths of Scripture. Before we look in detail at Jesus' words, Warren Wiersbe gives some great insight and wisdom concerning truths that will help as we study Jesus' words:

We are accustomed to dividing life into the "spiritual" and the "material," but Jesus made no such division. [In *all* of life, we are to honor and glorify God.] In many of Jesus' parables, He makes it clear that a right attitude toward wealth is a mark of true spirituality (see Luke 12:13ff; 16:1-31). If we have the true righteousness of Christ in our lives, then we will have a proper attitude toward material wealth. Nowhere did Jesus magnify poverty or criticize the legitimate getting of wealth. It is not wrong to possess things, but it is wrong for things to possess us. The sin of idolatry is as dangerous as the sin of hypocrisy. Jesus warned against the sin of living for

the things of this life. He pointed out the sad consequences of covetousness and idolatry. Materialism can enslave the heart, the mind and the will. We can become shackled by the material things of life, but we ought to be liberated and controlled by the Spirit of God (Wiersbe).

Please list some things that can become idols in our lives in 2016.

Is it possible to have wealth and material possessions and still be a follower of Jesus Christ?

Is it possible to be economically poor and not be a follower of Jesus Christ?

(V19) “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.”

“Lay up” and “treasures” come from the same Greek word in its basic form—(*thesaurizō*) “lay up” and (*thesaurus*) “treasures.” From these Greek words we get our English word “thesaurus,” which means “a treasury of words.” The translation of the literal Greek would be: “do not treasure up treasures for yourselves.” Also, with the Greek meaning there is the idea of stacking on top of one another, such as the idea of bricks being stacked on top of one another.

John MacArthur explains that Jesus is helping us to understand that if we accumulate wealth or possessions simply for our own sakes, whether to hoard or to spend selfishly and extravagantly, those possessions become idols.

Please read and examine the following Scriptures:

Matthew 25:27; Proverbs 6:6-8; Proverbs 14:23; Proverbs 24:3-4; Proverbs 28:19.

What are the biblical truths learned from these passages?

Jesus wants us to understand that it is right for His followers to work and provide for ourselves and our families. It is not contrary to Scripture to make wise investments. It is not wrong to prepare for the future. What *is* wrong is to become selfish and self-centered and to accumulate wealth and possessions simply for our own extravagant pleasures.

(V19b) “where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal”

To better understand this, we must remember the day in which these words were written. In the days of Scripture, wealth was measured in different ways and by different standards than today. Wealth was often measured by clothing or cloth. There were no mass-production companies. Items were individually made from various fabrics. But these fabrics were targets of the moth. Even the richest garments, sometimes interwoven with gold threads, were subject to insects, particularly the moth.

Another material treasure of biblical days was costly metals, which were often subjects of rust and corrosion. In the climate of Bible lands, insects and corrosion by rust thrived.

(V19c) “and where thieves break in and steal”

The danger of theft applies to almost all types of valuables in every time and place. The thief is mindfully working to steal away anything of value and worth.

(V20) “but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven”

As followers of Jesus Christ, we must understand that “neither having possessions, nor making provision for the future, nor enjoying the gifts of a good Creator are included in the ban on earthly treasure-storage” (Stott).

What then did Jesus mean by His words?

He speaks against His followers making wealth or material possessions their treasure. In the entire sermon on the mountain, Jesus speaks about the purity of His followers’ hearts (*our* hearts). The truth of Scripture is that where our hearts are, our treasure will always follow. Treasure laid up in heaven is incorruptible. The things that can happen to earthly treasure cannot happen to heavenly treasure.

Jesus is teaching us that the only real, secure treasure is the heavenly treasure. It is truly safe, for it cannot be touched by the pests, decay or corrosion of this world.

What is heavenly treasure?

**While living on earth, how can we make investments (lay up for yourselves treasure) in heaven?
Please answer prayerfully.**

(V21) Once again, it is simply a matter of the purity of our hearts. “Jesus is not saying that if we put our treasures in the right place our heart will then be in the right place, but that the location of our treasure indicates where our heart already is” (MacArthur).

Please read Exodus 35:21 and 1 Chronicles 29:2-6, 9.

G. Campbell Morgan wrote concerning the follower of Jesus Christ:

You are to remember with the passion burning within you that you are not the child of today. You are not of the earth, you are more than dust; you are the child of tomorrow, you are of the eternities. The measurements of your lives cannot be circumscribed by the point where blue sky kisses green earth. All the fact of your life cannot be encompassed in the one small sphere upon which you live. If you make your future on the earth—poor, sorry, silly soul—you have made a fortune and stored it in a place where you cannot hold it. Make your fortune, but store it where it will greet you in the dawning of the new morning.

Please read Proverbs 3:9-10; Luke 6:38; and 2 Corinthians 9:6.