

SESSION 2

TRANSFORMED IN MY PRAYER

▶ **The Point**

Prayer is grounded in a desire to honor God.

▶ **The Passage**

Matthew 6:9-15

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

Several years ago, I took a friend out for an afternoon of dove hunting. I set him up in a prime spot and gave him my best gun. I became more and more frustrated as the birds kept flying right over him—while his face remained buried in his smartphone.

I marched over to find out what was so important on his phone that kept him from being engaged in the hunt. In a slightly embarrassed tone, he told me he didn't know how to load the gun. He was watching a video on how to load the gun properly. I had assumed he knew what to do.

This experience reminded me that we must be taught many things in life. Prayer is a good example. Prayer is simply talking to God, which should be easy—yet Jesus saw the need to teach us how to pray. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us the principles of a prayer life that transforms. Commonly called the Lord's Prayer, Jesus' words have also been referred to as the Model Prayer, since they serve as a guide for how we are to pray.

▶ **The Setting**

With a multitude of people gathered on a mountainside to listen, Jesus delivered what we know today as the Sermon on the Mount. He called His disciples together so He could teach them how to live as citizens of God's kingdom. As part of His instructions, He directed their attention to the discipline of prayer. Jesus intended for His disciples to engage in this spiritual discipline in a way that would enable them to honor God.

What does the Bible say?

Kingdom (v. 10)—A dominion ruled by a king. The kingdom of God is a spiritual dominion over which He reigns with authority and majesty.

Daily bread (v. 11)—The people of Jesus' day did not have many options for food storage. Therefore, bread and other meals were prepared each day in specified amounts.

Debts (v. 12)—These are not financial balances due, but sins for which a person was accountable. The debt was sin, and the debtor was the sinner.

Matthew 6:9-15

9 "Therefore, you should pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,
Your name be honored as holy.

10 Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

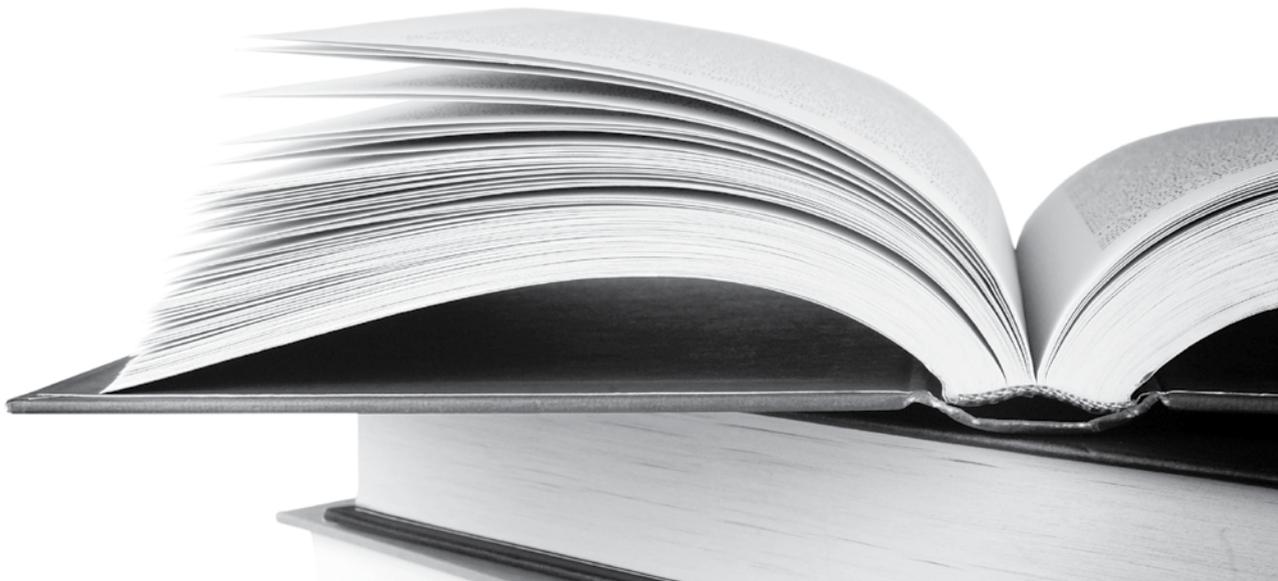
11 Give us today our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And do not bring us into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.
[For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]

14 "For if you forgive people their wrongdoing, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well.

15 But if you don't forgive people, your Father will not forgive your wrongdoing.



GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 21 of the PSG: **“When have you tried to learn something on your own?”**

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 22 of the PSG. Introduce the theme of prayer by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): One of the challenges of discussing prayer in a group setting is that most of your group members will be very familiar with that practice. Therefore, give them a new experience by leading a “concert prayer” to start your gathering. To make this happen, instruct group members to spend one or two minutes praying out loud, all at the same time. Each person can pray as they normally would in the group—praise, thanks, requests, and so on. However, the goal is to create a “joyful noise” where everyone sends their prayers upward in a unified chorus.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” at the top of page 22 of the PSG: **“Prayer is grounded in a desire to honor God.”**

LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 2 in a prominent place in your meeting space. Use it to reinforce the major theme of this study and to remind group members that prayer is one of the ways we connect with God’s power.

PRAY: Transition into the study by thanking God for the privilege of approaching Him through prayer. Ask for a fresh perspective on that privilege as you and your group members study God’s Word together.

TIP: Get expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid. Visit ministrygrid.com/web/biblestudiesforlife.

Matthew 6:9-10

[Verse 9] Jesus had been teaching His disciples about the discipline of prayer. He'd warned believers about the wrong way to pray (see verses 5-8). Next, Jesus taught about the right way to pray. Specifically, we pray so that we can be with our heavenly Father—talk with Him, listen to Him, and surrender to Him. When we pray the right way, our relationship with Him will grow stronger and deeper, and we will be able to serve Him more consistently.

In verse 9, Jesus began a model prayer for His disciples to follow. And from the very beginning of that prayer, Jesus taught us to use **our** instead of *my*. When we use *our*, *us*, and *we* in prayer, we keep others in mind. By using such pronouns, Jesus affirmed the value of public prayer in worship. Also, these pronouns enable us to remember the second great commandment: to love our neighbors as ourselves (see Matt. 22:39). Our walk with the Lord cannot be separated from our relationships with others.

Jesus taught to give attention first to **Our Father in heaven** when we pray. In doing so, He underscored a Christian's unique intimacy with God. Jesus encouraged us to approach Him like a child in the company of a loving Father. If we ever have doubts about our Father's love for us, we only have to reflect on the cross. Still, we must also keep in mind God's majesty. He is in heaven. He rules there, and we belong there. Therefore, when we turn to Him in prayer, He deserves our sincere respect and authentic reverence as both His children and His subjects.

In Jesus' day, a name implied something about a person's character. Jesus directed attention to God's character and instructed us to honor God as **holy**. Honoring God's holiness means exhibiting His character in our thoughts, words, and actions. In prayer, it means affirming our eagerness for all people everywhere to recognize and worship Him as holy.

[Verse 10] God's **kingdom** is in heaven. Christians are citizens there (see Phil. 3:20). This kingdom isn't formed by land masses. It doesn't grow by invading and occupying other nations. Instead, it's formed by relationships. As people receive God's gift of salvation through Christ, they become citizens of His kingdom. Whenever a person is born again, therefore, God's kingdom in heaven comes **on earth**.

The reason we pray for God's kingdom to come to earth is clear in the Model Prayer. When His kingdom comes to earth, we will do everything He wants in the way He wants it done. On earth, we struggle with doing what God wants because we prefer what we want. We resolve the struggle in prayer by declaring our desire and intention to give God complete control over our lives each day. In that way, we allow His will to be **done on earth**.

Matthew 6:11-13

[Verse 11] Once we submit ourselves to God and His kingdom, we can bring up our needs as we pray. Jesus taught how He intends for His followers to bring needs to the heavenly Father. In His instruction, two details come into view. First, Jesus taught to ask the Father to give us what we need—**our daily bread**. In the ancient world, bread was a basic resource needed to sustain life. With it, people would be able to live. Without it, they would starve. Therefore, their priority every day was bread.

Jesus took the reality of bread for the coming day to encourage disciples to ask the heavenly Father each day to meet their needs as they served Him daily. By asking Him to meet our needs, we acknowledge that He provides everything necessary for us as we serve Him. It also reflects our dependence on Him.

Second, Jesus showed us once again to keep others in mind as we pray. Instead of asking God for *my* daily bread, Jesus guided us to pray for **our** daily needs to be met. As we bring up what we need, we'll do well to remember the needs of others who are devoted to Him, too.

[Verse 12] Along with resources and physical supplies, we also pray for what we need to strengthen our relationships. Jesus pointed out that strengthening relationships with our heavenly Father and others involves forgiveness. He made that point by reminding us that we have **debts** because of our sin. Of course, the debt was paid when Jesus gave His life for us on the cross. Once we are saved, we live as forgiven sinners. Yet we still sin, and we cannot dismiss that reality or pretend it doesn't exist. Calling attention to our debt prompts us to ask God to forgive us. As a result, our relationship with Him is strengthened by the fresh joy of His forgiveness.

But forgiveness has another dimension. Our relationships with others need to be strengthened, too. And they're strengthened by forgiving others. Instead of holding a grudge or retaliating when others wrong us, kingdom citizens determine to forgive them. We have no other choice in light of the forgiveness we've experienced in our walk with our heavenly Father. Jesus expects us to forgive others before we ask our heavenly Father to forgive us.

[Verse 13] We also are directed to ask for His help to steer clear of anything that would draw our focus away from serving Him. Jesus encouraged us to pray for spiritual direction. Sometimes our most difficult struggle involves resisting **temptation**. Because of that struggle, we ask for our heavenly Father's direction when we pray. Specifically, we ask Him to guide us so we will not pass through the way of temptation, but go instead in a direction that will honor Him.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

Matthew 6:14-15

14 *“For if you forgive people their wrongdoing, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. 15 But if you don’t forgive people, your Father will not forgive your wrongdoing.*

READ: Matthew 6:14-15 on page 23 of the PSG.

RECAP: Call attention to the third and fourth paragraphs on page 27 of the PSG:

As human beings, we’ve all sinned against Almighty God, our Creator and Lord of all. Yet He has chosen to set us free from our sin. Through Jesus, He completely provided for our forgiveness. Given that truth, how can we refuse to forgive others? To be offered such incredible and undeserved forgiveness while still harboring unforgiveness in our own hearts is, frankly, appalling.

When Jesus said, “your Father will not forgive your wrongdoing” (v. 15), He didn’t mean God is unable to forgive. Let’s never lose sight of the infinite love that led Jesus to the cross to secure our freedom and forgiveness. God is always willing and capable to forgive—but when we’re unforgiving toward others, we leave no room for God’s forgiveness in our lives. We lack the capacity to receive His forgiveness.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 27 of the PSG: **“Given Jesus’ warning in verse 15, how can we help each other grow in our ability to forgive?”**

Note: Begin by focusing the conversation on how Christians in general can grow in their ability to forgive, and then narrow things down to how the members of your group can help one another.

GUIDE: Use the final two paragraphs on page 35 of this Leader Guide to point out other instances in which Jesus emphasized the critical importance of forgiveness.

GUIDE: Refer back to “The Point” for this session: **“Prayer is grounded in a desire to honor God.”** If time permits, encourage volunteers to share any final thoughts and questions.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
When have you seen the power of forgiveness change lives?

Matthew 6:14-15

[Verse 14] When we received God's gift of salvation through Christ, we confessed our sins and He forgave us. He took away the sins of the past, present, and future. Now that we follow our Lord as forgiven sinners, forgiveness continues to play a critical role in our growth toward spiritual maturity. It serves as a crucial spiritual discipline that He expects us to practice. Forgiving is something we determine to do so we will grow in the Lord. Only when we embrace forgiveness as a discipline of our faith in Him can we appreciate the value of Jesus' instruction about it in the Model Prayer.

As we practice the spiritual discipline of forgiveness, we come to understand that it's a matter of the heart. Our hearts can be filled with an unwillingness to forgive people who have violated us with their wrongdoings. The term **wrongdoing** in this verse describes either a willful transgression or an unintentional offense. Either way, when we allow unforgiveness to remain in our hearts, it can turn into resentment and foster a desire for retaliation or revenge.

When we forgive, we empty our hearts of the need to retaliate. Of course, doing so may take quite a bit of effort. But we give ourselves to this hard work because we refuse to harbor resentment, which stunts our spiritual growth. When we take the hard road of forgiving, we trust the Lord to help us. That's when we can expect Him to fill our hearts with the joy that comes when we experience His forgiveness in prayer. When we forgive, we're ready to experience His forgiveness. That's when we can ask Him to take our sins away.

[Verse 15] However, if we do not practice the spiritual discipline of forgiveness, we will pay a high spiritual price. If our hearts are full of resentment because others have crossed the line in our lives and hurt us, we leave no room to receive God's forgiveness. Consequently, our relationship with Him is damaged, and our growth in Him is stalled.

This matter of nourishing a forgiving heart was so important to Jesus that He brought it to our attention several times. For example, in His parable of the unforgiving steward, He showed us the absurdity of expecting to be forgiven by God when we refuse to forgive others (see Matt. 18:23-35). His instruction about moving mountains when we pray also drives home the need to forgive. He instructed us to trust Him when we pray to move mountains. But at the same time, He expects us to forgive people who have hurt us (see Mark 11:25).

When we take seriously Christ's mandate to forgive others before we seek His forgiveness, we will be better equipped to honor Him when we pray.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 28 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider the following suggestions for putting Jesus' Model Prayer into practice in the coming week:



Notes

Dotted lines for notes

- ▶ **Evaluate yourself.** Do a quick comparison between your typical prayers and Jesus' Model Prayer. Do you spend time each day praising God for who He is? Are your prayers more self-centered or kingdom-focused? Is there unconfessed sin in your life? Is there someone against whom you are harboring unforgiveness?
- ▶ **Double up.** Each day this week, spend twice as much time in prayer as you typically do. Use the Model Prayer to guide you as you pray.
- ▶ **Seek reconciliation.** Make an effort at reconciling a damaged or broken relationship this week. Begin by praying daily for the person involved. Offer forgiveness if necessary, or seek forgiveness if you were in the wrong. Reach out with a phone call or letter and declare your hopes for reconciliation.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the Conclusion from page 28 of the PSG:

It's a sad reality that many people in the church today have never been taught how to pray. Fortunately, we have Jesus' Model Prayer to guide our thoughts—not to mention the Holy Spirit to guide our hearts. With such valuable help, anyone can find meaningful prayer that blesses our lives and honors our God.

PRAY: Conclude by acknowledging to God that prayer is not just a privilege, but also a responsibility. Ask for help as you and your group members seek to grow in developing the discipline of prayer.