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## The Lord's Prayer

Early Christians treasured a prayer that they said Jesus had taught his disciples, and they made it part of their private devotional lives and liturgical worship services. Traditionally called “the Lord’s Prayer” or “the Our Father,” the prayer is preserved in three early documents: Matthew 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4; *Didache* 8:2 (the *Didache* being a nonbiblical writing from the early second century). The prayer is very Jewish in form and content. Indeed, in Matthew, Jesus presents it in explicit contrast to the type of prayers said by gentiles (6:7).

The metaphorical identification of God as “Father” is typical for Matthew, occurring ten times in 6:1–18 alone (see also 5:16, 45, 48; 6:26, 32; 7:11, 21; 10:32, 33; 12:50; 15:13; 16:17; 18:10, 14, 19, 35; 20:23; 25:34; 26:29, 42, 53; 28:19). For Matthew, this image presents God as both a caring parent and an authority figure, as the one whose unilateral decisions are to be respected by the whole family of believers (cf. 23:9). By encouraging his followers to call God “Father,” Jesus urges them both to respect God’s authority and to trust in God’s generosity and providential wisdom.

The prayers for God’s name to be hallowed, for God’s kingdom to come, and for God’s will to be done are parallel petitions that state the same basic request three times in slightly different words. For

Matthew, the essential request is for God to bring to fulfillment what has begun with Jesus. The kingdom has already drawn near (4:17), Jesus and his followers are bringing God's will to accomplishment (5:17), and God's name is being glorified on account of them (5:16). Jesus's followers are to pray for the work of Christ to continue.

Three more petitions make simple requests of God, ones that Jesus deems appropriate for people to make at any time. The request for "daily bread" flows from an assumption that all followers of Jesus will embrace a simple lifestyle. Bread serves as a metaphor for life's necessities; Jesus's followers are to ask that God provide them with what they need, no more, but also no less.

The request for forgiveness of sins (literally, "debts") is traditional for Judaism. Jesus attaches to it a reminder that those who seek such forgiveness ought also to forgive others. To emphasize the point, Matthew quotes another saying of Jesus on this subject (6:14–15) and elsewhere records a parable that Jesus told to illustrate the lesson (18:23–35). Within the Sermon on the Mount, this need to forgive others becomes the only facet of Jesus's moral teaching deemed so important that his followers are to remind themselves of it every time they pray.

The next petition is easily misunderstood when translated, "Lead us not into temptation," since neither Matthew nor Jesus would have wanted to imply the possibility that God might tempt people to sin. Rather, the request is for God to guide Jesus's followers in such a

way that they will not experience trials that could test their faith (cf. 26:41). According to the parable of the sower (13:3–9, 18–23), such trials might take the form of hardship (“trouble or persecution”) or distraction (“the cares of the world and the lure of wealth”).

Elsewhere, Matthew indicates that some trials are inevitable (18:7; 24:9–13). Thus the petition continues with the plea “Deliver us from evil” (or, “the evil one”). Jesus’s followers are to ask that they be spared trials whenever possible, and, when this is not possible, that they be protected from the potentially destructive consequences of such experiences (cf. James 1:2–4; 1 Pet. 1:6–7).

A well-known conclusion to the Lord’s Prayer (“Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen”; KJV) was not originally in the Bible. It was written by early Christians when the prayer came to be used in liturgical worship. Later, some copies of the New Testament began adding the conclusion to the text with the result that it is found today in a few English translations (including the KJV).

### ***Primary Resources***

Matthias, Philip. *The Perfect Prayer: Search for the Kingdom through the Lord’s Prayer*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2005.

Stevenson, Kenneth W. *The Lord’s Prayer: A Text in Tradition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.

### ***Related Resources***

Cullman, Oscar. *Prayer in the New Testament*. OBT. Minneapolis:

Fortress, 1995.

Karris, Robert J. *Prayer and the New Testament: Jesus and His*

*Communities at Worship*. New York: Crossroad, 2000.

Longenecker, Richard N. *Into God's Presence: Prayer in the New*

*Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.