

minutes. We won't exhaust the topic – but let's walk around and kick the tires for a few moments anyway, shall we?

There are six essential petitions in the prayer that Jesus gives to his followers to use as a model. Like the ten commandments, the first section of the prayer concerns the power, authority, and holiness of God, and the rest of the prayer has to do with the ways that we live in response to who God is in the world.



Our Father, who art in heaven: hallowed be thy name... First, let's acknowledge that the point of this prayer is not to demonstrate that the creator of heaven and earth is a male, and that God is not the same as my dad or as your dad. With this

kind of language, Jesus is assuring his followers that God is *not* merely an idea or a concept or a framework. When using the word "Father" to refer to God, Jesus is directing us toward a loving, authoritative, creative personality whose very essence is relational.

And yet this personal and loving God is so pure and incorruptible that his very name is *hallowed* – holy. In our quest to honor the person, we will go so far as to honor the name itself as a sign of respect.



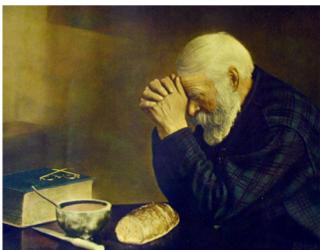
God's personhood, holiness, and parenthood – the relational nature of the Divine – it has an end or a goal. *Thy kingdom come.* The relational nature of God is to be experienced in the midst of a reality that we can apprehend and understand. There is a royal rule, a reign, in which we come to know who God is and what God values. There is a shape to the set of relationships that the person of

God embodies, and there are boundaries that we do not get to define. The right to determine how and where and what right living looks like belongs to God alone, and we pray that we might know that in our own frameworks.



Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven... In prayer, we ask that the perfect intentions of the creator come to pass in our own experience. We lay open our hearts to reveal that what we want – or what we *want to want*, at any rate – is for things here to provide us with a glimpse into the way that things ought to be, and the way that things will be in the eternal fullness and reality of God’s unending presence and care. Bring your perfection, your justice, your holiness, your healing, your mercy – bring *those things* to this experience right now, dear Lord...

After we pray for the pre-eminence of God’s name, God’s kingdom, and God’s will, then we turn our attention to the things that we need and experience in our own daily existence.



¹*Give us this day our daily bread...* When some of the earliest followers of Jesus were talking about and teaching this prayer, they were surprised that after dealing with concepts as eternal and powerful as God’s perfect and eternal intentions for the creation, Jesus shifted immediately to something as mundane as bread. This part of the prayer seems so simple, they thought, that Jesus simply *must* be talking about something else. And so great teachers like St. Augustine taught that “daily bread” must be some sort of a code, not for the substance that we need from day to day, but for the

¹ [Grace](#), photograph by Eric Enstrom, 1918

invisible bread that the word of God becomes in the life of the believer.

As the church matured and grew, however, more and more teachers began to take Jesus at face value, and Christian leaders like Martin Luther and John Calvin taught that in sharing this petition, Jesus is instructing his followers to ask God for the basic needs of life, and not to be preoccupied with luxuries and fantasies. In praying today for what we need today, we are free to live one day at a time and not be overwhelmed by the spectre of things to come.



Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors... OK, now things just got real. I don't know about you, but I can pray the rest of the Lord's prayer feeling pretty good about myself, but when I get to the part where I am asking God to hold me to the same standard that I'm using against other people, well, I get a little nervous... But that's the prayer, isn't it? And frankly, if it's not plain here, it sure is a few lines lower, where Jesus says, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Including this petition in our model prayer is the Lord's way of reminding his followers that we all have departed from God's best for the world and therefore we all need forgiveness. When we become aware of how we have broken faith with God and others, and we also see the remedy for that: we participate best in the rule,

intentions, kingdom, and family of God as we learn to be people of forgiveness and reconciliation – characteristics and qualities we see in the Father and are called to by the Son.



²*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...* The prayer closes with a pointed reminder of the ways that we are weak and frail. God is powerful and strong and full of singularly righteous intentions...and we are distractible and

easily overwhelmed. This final plea of the Lord's prayer is a deep statement of our inability to withstand evil – whether from within our selves or from the outside – on our own. If we are to triumph, it will be because we are walking in the hand of God.

So there you have it – a few thoughts on the one element of worship that we repeat more often than just about anything else. It is one of the first prayers that we learn as children, and it is the last one we forget in our old age.

² Eric Armusik, *The Temptation of Christ*, 2011
<http://www.ericarmusik.com/religious-art/>



As we consider that prayer this morning, I'd like to make a final observation about the structure and content and then invite you to use it even more in the days to come than you have used it in the past.

We can't easily dismiss that this prayer is given to us in the context of community. "Our Father...Give us...Forgive us...Deliver us..." Following Jesus is not a solitary activity, and we do violence to both the composition and intent of this prayer if we change it to read "My father...give me...forgive me...deliver me..."

When I come before God I must remember that I am not standing there alone, but rather in the company of the whole people of God. When I pray for my daily bread, it is only with an awareness of the fact that my neighbor, too, needs and deserves enough to eat. As I notice and ask God's mercy on my own failures, I realize that the only way to receive mercy and forgiveness is to live in that place – to pass along what I have received from God to those who seek it from me. In asking for God's protection from foolishness and weakness, I must do so naming our own interdependence and connectivity. This prayer, like

the best of worship, is corporate in nature – it is offered not by one in the wilderness, but by God’s people standing together across time and space.

With that in mind, then, let me invite you to use this prayer each day this week in your own life. Try reading through it line by line, or writing the lines on a paper one at a time. Reflect on each phrase, and join me in working to make this prayer more about our community’s relationship with God and our relationship with each other than it is about our own individual selves.

In talking about prayer with his followers and in offering them this prayer in particular as a model, Jesus is affirming the fact that prayer is a statement of humility and dependence. Prayer is a vehicle, not for acquisition and accumulation, but rather for reconciliation and forgiveness. May our prayer and our lives together be a reflection of that, and therefore, a sign of God’s kingdom intentions in this world. Thanks be to God, Amen.