

WHEN YOU PRAY

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Jen Wilkin, Jennifer Rothschild, Jada Edwards, Kristi McLelland

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ABOUT THIS *Study*

This Bible study is unique.

Each session was written by a different Lifeway Women Bible study author.

Each session has video teaching, filmed at a two-day Lifeway Women Live event.

Each author brings her particular style and pacing to the video teaching and personal study. Their individual styles and approaches to study combine to make this a Bible study experience that will open up the words of Scripture to you in a brand new way.

Each day of study begins and ends with guided prayers and prayer prompts to help you build conversation with God into your daily rhythms. The opening prayers to each day are David's words to the Lord from Psalm 119 that capture his delight in God's Word and encourage you to do the same. The closing prayers challenge you to apply what you learned in that day's study.

Because this study is unique, you can use it in different ways.

- Conduct the study as a regular consecutive-week study on your own or with a small group.
- Use this study as a retreat curriculum or large group study, paired with the *When You Pray* Group Experience Kit.

Regardless of how you choose to study, we recommend you check out all the extra resources available at lifeway.com/whenyoupray.

LEADING A GROUP? A free leader guide PDF is available for download at lifeway.com/whenyoupray. The leader guide offers several tips and helps, along with discussion guides for each week.

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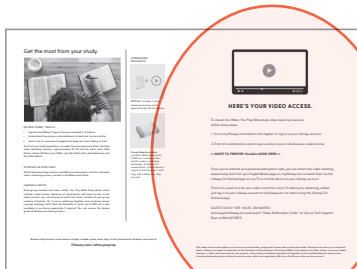
WHAT'S *Inside*



PERSONAL STUDY: Each week, you'll have five days of personal study with questions to help you process and apply what you read. After you finish a session of personal study, it's time to watch the teaching video.



WATCH: These pages provide a place to take notes from the video teachings. You'll want to begin your study with the Session One video and then watch the rest of the videos after you finish each session of personal study.



VIDEO ACCESS: With the purchase of this book, you have access to teaching videos that provide content to help you better understand and apply what you just studied in the previous session. You'll find detailed information for how to access the teaching videos on the card inserted in the back of your Bible study book.

A NOTE ABOUT BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

This study will primarily use the Christian Standard Bible translation (CSB). However, reading the same passage of Scripture from more than one translation is a helpful study tool, and we'll incorporate several translations in the pages of this book and in the videos. Here are a few of the others we'll use, which will be marked by their abbreviations:

- English Standard Version (ESV)
- New American Standard Bible (NASB)
- New International Version (NIV)
- New King James Version (NKJV)
- New Living Translation (NLT)

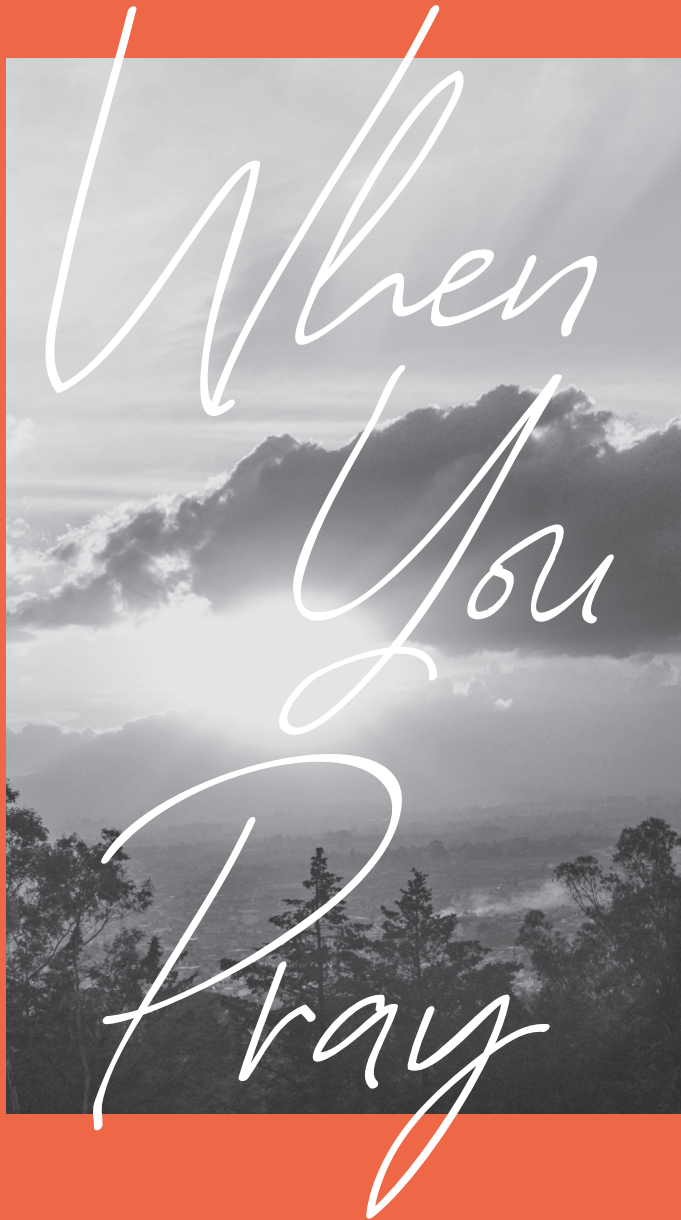
You can find all of these translations on a Bible app or websites such as biblegateway.com or biblehub.com.

LOOKING FOR MORE?

You'll find videos from the authors, a free leader guide, promotional resources, and more at lifeway.com/whenyoupray



SESSION ONE



INTRODUCTION

Prayer, simply put, is talking with God. It is designed by God to be a beautiful gift of communication between the Creator and the children created in His image. We are a world of born communicators, so prayer should come naturally to us. But depending on the amount of time you've spent as a follower of Christ, your prayer life has likely ebbed and flowed through seasons of intimate conversation to uncomfortable silence and back again.

Oftentimes, we find it difficult to pray consistently, or we feel like our prayers lack passion and power. Sometimes, we make it to the end of busy days only to realize we haven't prayed at all. In other moments, we're so overcome with longing or loss that we struggle to find words to express the groanings of our hearts. And in other moments, our souls overflow with gratitude for God's grace.

At one point in the Gospel of Luke, we read Jesus "was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray'" (Luke 11:1). Of all the conversations the four Gospels give us between Jesus and His disciples, this was the only time when one of them asked Jesus to teach him how to do something. It seems he knew what you know: Prayer is important, and it's hard. He also knew Jesus was the right One to ask. Anytime the disciples were looking for Him, they found Him in prayer.

Thankfully, just as Jesus taught His disciples to pray, God's Word gives us invaluable insight on this topic, too. Most notably, we learn there's no one right way! Some prayers

are deeply personal; others are intended for a gathered group. Some are carefully composed; others are spontaneous. Some prayers are cries of longing and frustration; other prayers are songs of praise. Some are confessions of personal sin; others are intercession on behalf of another. And each of them—every single prayer we utter—is a means of positioning ourselves to hear from God and know Him more.

As the prayers of the Bible demonstrate, God invites all your words, all the time. But as you study the prayers of the Bible and adopt their rhythms as your own, you'll learn that prayer is about so much more than asking God for things. It's about a never-ending conversation with your heavenly Father.

**GOD
INVITES
ALL YOUR
WORDS,
ALL THE
TIME.**

Throughout God's Word, we encounter many voices whose prayers model the act of prayer for us. In this study we'll consider six of them—Jesus's model prayer (His response when the disciples asked Him to teach them) and examples of petition, praise, lament, intercession, and unity. To help, we've assembled a group of beloved Bible teachers who will unpack the meaning of these prayers. Through each of their unique writing styles, Bible study methods, and teaching gifts, these women bring their God-given wisdom to the prayers of the Bible and will help you learn what to say when you pray.

Laura Magness

WATCH

SESSION ONE

Watch the Session One video and take notes below.

**TO ACCESS THE VIDEO SESSIONS, USE THE INSTRUCTIONS
IN THE BACK OF YOUR BIBLE STUDY BOOK.**



SESSION TWO



BY KELLY MINTER

Prayer is one of those incredibly significant parts of our Christian lives that's also attended by challenges, questions, and mysteries. It's not always as easy or straightforward of a practice as we wish it to be. Perhaps you find yourself wondering, among many other things, *Am I praying the "right way," according to God's will?* I think Jesus's disciples wanted to know this, too. What could give us more assurance about the practice of prayer than praying the very words of Jesus? This is why I'm eager to begin our study on prayer together with the words Jesus taught His followers to pray.

The Lord's Prayer, which we find versions of in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4, will set the foundation for the rest of our study and all our prayers. This is essential because we don't want to just study prayer—we want to become deeper and more effective pray-ers. I suppose this is a good time for me to confess that prayer has historically been a weakness of mine; it's a discipline I've had to grow in. The prayer of Jesus we're studying this week has been especially helpful for me because when I don't know what to pray, it puts words to my longings. When I'm distracted, it keeps me on track with its praises and petitions. When I'm confused, it helps me pray according to God's will. And as much as it's a model prayer, we shouldn't think of it as a rote one. Each portion of Jesus's prayer allows for a thousand others to be uttered, prayers that are specific to our own lives and His work in our world.

As we begin this first week of study, it's helpful to keep in mind the context of the Lord's Prayer. It sits at the dead center of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus's teaching on how to live as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven right here in our everyday lives. Surely this is no coincidence—prayer is central to Jesus's teaching. Since Jesus's Sermon shines light on the prayer we're studying, we'll turn to different portions of it throughout the week.

What a joy we have ahead of us. May Jesus Himself teach us to pray.

This Week's Prayer

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 6:5-13

PRAYER TYPE

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
your name be
honored as holy.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
on earth as it is
in heaven.

MATTHEW 6:9b-10

DAY ONE

THE SECRET PLACE

Before we get to this week's main passage of study, **TURN TO LUKE'S GOSPEL AND READ 11:1-4.**

What did the disciple ask Jesus to do?

As obvious as this may seem, what do we learn about prayer from the fact that the disciples felt they needed to be taught how to pray?

The more Jesus's disciples understood He was moving them from an Old Testament perspective of covenants and laws to what life would look like in relationship with Him, the more they realized He was forming a distinct community out of them. The disciples wanted to know how to pray as that new community in light of His kingdom having come.¹ And as followers of Christ today, so do we.

To better understand "The Lord's Prayer"—some call it "The Disciple's Prayer," since we're the ones praying it—we'll begin where Jesus did. He did not actually jump straight into praying; rather, He focused on our approach to prayer and the nature of our heavenly Father to whom we pray.

READ MATTHEW 6:5-8.

Sometimes the best way to learn how to do something is by first learning how *not* to do it. When my dad was teaching me how to drive in our family's 4-cylinder, stick-shift minivan (the worst vehicle to cut your driving teeth on), he would say, or occasionally yell, things like, *Don't let your foot off the clutch too fast. Don't roll back into the car behind you on an incline at a light. Don't run yellow lights. Kelly, you're stalling!* I had a running list in the *Whatever-You-Do-Don't-Do-This* category. Under much less stressful conditions, Jesus employed this helpful technique when it comes to prayer.

Before you begin today's study, pray **Psalm 119:18,**

Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction.

In verse 5, Jesus told His disciples not to pray like what type of people? Why?

Whether we pray to be noticed or don't pray so we aren't noticed, both have to do with fear of people instead of a reverence for God.

In first-century Jewish culture, the Jews prayed three times a day—in the morning, around mid-afternoon, and before bed. Some of the religious leaders timed their arrival to sacred places like the temple or crowded places like the street corners so people could take notice of their spiritual dedication. Their motive had more to do with being applauded by people than meeting with God. Jesus said, *Don't pray like this.*

I can't help but wonder if Jesus were giving this message today, would He take an opposite approach by encouraging us *to* pray in front of people more than we do? Not only are most of us not guilty of praying on street corners, we may not want to thank God for our meal in a restaurant or ask a neighbor if we can stop to pray for her in a challenging season for fear of what people might think. Whether we pray to be noticed or don't pray so we aren't noticed, both have to do with fear of people instead of a reverence for God.

In what settings do you feel the pull to pray in a way that others will notice how spiritual you are? Why do you think this is a temptation?

In what settings do you avoid praying because of what others might think of you? What do you think is your root fear?

LOOK BACK AT VERSE 6. What three things did Jesus tell us we should do when we pray?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Jesus wasn't suggesting we never pray in public or with other people. The very nature of the Disciple's Prayer is one that's to be prayed in community, not to mention we see the disciples praying together at various times in the New Testament (see Luke 9:28; 22:45-46; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 12:12). Jesus's focus is on the motivation of our hearts. If we escape to a private room where no one can see us and close the door so no one can hear us, our prayers become solely about meeting with God rather than about what we might gain from others.

Our heavenly Father doesn't feed off flashy and showy displays of religiosity; rather, He delights to show up in the quiet places for those seeking authentic communion with Him.

When we pray *to* commune with the living God, Jesus said our Father *sees* us in secret. Whereas the religious hypocrites prayed loudly to be seen by people, the praying woman who closes the door in her home does so to be seen by God. And He not only *sees* her in secret; He "*is* in secret" (v. 6, emphasis mine), meaning He dwells with us in our quiet places, a reference to His omnipresence (He is present everywhere) but also to His genuine nature.² Our heavenly Father doesn't feed off flashy and showy displays of religiosity; rather, He delights to show up in the quiet places for those seeking authentic communion with Him. What an invitation of intimacy prayer is.

How does the Father seeing what no one else sees and being uniquely present with you in a way no one else can encourage you to spend time with Him in prayer?

Jesus used the word *reward* in both verses 5 and 6.

Describe the hypocrites' reward.

Who rewards the person who prays with the right motives?

The reward the hypocrites were after was the reward they got—the finicky and unsatisfying applause of people. I expect Jesus to counteract that by saying genuine prayers don't come with rewards. But He surprises us. Our heavenly Father rewards us when we pray. He doesn't specify the reward but guarantees it. I've had to think about this because it seems counter-intuitive that God would reward us for praying when the whole point of this passage is that we would seek Him with pure motives instead of for, well, rewards.

But when I think about the ways we reward one another, I realize how much of it is based on mutual trust. When I tell my nieces and nephew that if they're kind to each other we'll have Mexican for dinner, at least part of their reason for obeying me is that they believe I'll do what I've said—chips and salsa for all. Similarly, when we forgo the applause of people for the reward of our Father, we're trusting that being with Him will bring greater blessing than what others can bring us. Even if His reward doesn't come as quickly as a congratulatory word from the crowd, we believe He will do as He promised. Looking forward to prayer's reward isn't selfish; it's rooted in trust.

What rewards have you experienced through prayer?

LOOK BACK AT VERSES 7-8. In verse 5, Jesus told His disciples not to pray like the hypocrites. Whom did He tell them not to pray like in verse 7?

How did the Gentiles (pagans) pray?

The term *Gentiles* was another way of referring to pagan people who worshiped a pantheon of gods. Whether they were begging the sun god to bring them heat or the rain god to bring them showers for their crops, their gods were unpredictable. There was no possibility of relationship, only the hope of manipulating the gods to do what they needed them to. So, they carried on with empty repetitions.

What reason did Jesus give for why we don't need to pray like the Gentiles (v. 8)?

The fact that our heavenly Father already knows what we need before we ask Him brings some of us comfort and others frustration. What is your response and why?

I used to wonder why we have to pray if God already knows what we need. But then I thought: *What if our Father in heaven didn't know what we needed?* That would really be terrifying. We'd be left babbling for His attention like the Gentiles, scrambling to have our needs met, hoping He heard the urgent prayer we prayed. "If God is worth His salt, He can be nothing less than all-knowing."³

How does God's personal, powerful, and all-knowing nature influence the way you pray and the words you use?

We'll look more at God's nature and the relational aspect of prayer in the coming days, but let's close with a reminder of these wonderful truths. First, we don't have to pray like the religious hypocrites because what we long for in prayer isn't receiving accolades from people but a relationship with God. Second, we don't have to pray like the irreligious pagans who carried on in hopes of having their needs met because our God is different. He is loving, personal, all-knowing, and delights to meet with us in the secret place. And lastly, prayer is filled with reward. As we will see in more detail this week, our Father delights to give good things to His children. So whether He rewards us with tangible gifts or shares with us more of His presence, we are blessed when we pray.



When You Pray Today

What a perfect time to find a “**secret place**” so you can pray to your heavenly Father. Remember, He not only *sees* in secret but *is* in secret with you. **Find that quiet place.** Whether it's a favored chair, a park you like to walk in, or your actual closet, **He longs to meet with you.**

Before you
begin today's
study, pray
Psalm 119:18,

Open my
eyes so
that I may
contemplate
wondrous
things
from your
instruction.

DAY TWO

BEGINNING WITH GOD

I wonder how you begin your prayers. Do you jump straight in? Do you pause in silence before praying? Do you pray Scripture? And with what kinds of things do you start? Jesus teaches us to begin our prayers by focusing on God. This seems like the most obvious thing in the world to me until I realize I don't always start here. How often do I immediately jump into my pressing needs, my unmet longings, and my day's concerns?

This isn't all bad—I believe God desires we bring Him our earnest desires. But the Lord's Prayer makes certain that before we get to any of our personal petitions, we have the privilege of correcting course, bending our wills toward His despite our resistance, clinging to our Father's ways even when leaving behind our own feels like it just might kill us. It is here, at the very top of our prayers, that we place ourselves under the rule and reign of our loving heavenly Father. Here, we align our hearts and ambitions with His! Here, we say, *Your name* above our ego, our being right, our being esteemed by others. Here, we declare *Your ways* above all others because no one is greater, more loving, or more worthy than the Father in heaven who is *ours*.

“When we start with Him, all other petitions are sure to fall in holy line.”⁴

READ MATHEW 6:9-13, giving special attention to verses 9-10.

Jesus's Model Prayer begins with:

Our _____ in _____

In first-century Judaism, it was unusual to refer to God as Father because of the title's intimate nature. Jesus revealed that with the inauguration of His kingdom, God has become “as accessible as the most loving human parent.”⁵ At the same time, He remains Almighty God. This combination offers the kindness and care of a loving Father with the power and glory of His position in heaven.

You could have a tender father who's without power, and you can have a mighty strong dad who's without love, but reflect for a moment on this: How does having God as both loving Father and heavenly Ruler shape the way you pray?

From verses 9-10, fill in the following:

We want God's _____ to be hallowed or honored as holy.

We want His _____ to come.

We want His _____ to be done.

Each of these petitions is a slight variation of the same request.⁶ Like three tributaries running into the same river, our desire for God's renown, reign, and rule all flow toward His throne. As broad as the ideas of God's name, kingdom, and will are, it will help to define them as best we can in a limited space.

GOD'S NAME: A name represents the person who bears it. So, when we exalt God's name as honored and holy, we're exalting His Person, His actions, His nature. God's name isn't merely about His title. It refers to His person, character, and authority.⁷

READ PSALM 30:4. How did the psalmist describe God's name?

Multiple places in the Old Testament describe God's name as holy (see Ps. 97:12; 103:1; 111:9; Isa. 29:23). When we honor God's holy name, we're honoring God.

READ 1 SAMUEL 12:20-25. On what basis did God choose not to reject His people, even though they had sinned against Him (v. 22)?

We see here that God was good and gracious to His people when they didn't deserve it—when they rejected Him for a human king. But we also see that His love and mercy for them was a reflection of His holy name. This unfathomable grace would ultimately reach its fulfillment in a new name.

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11. How does God treat the name of Jesus (v. 9)?

Names have always been important. We name our children after loved ones. We honor those who have passed away by preserving their names on tombstones. We even name companies, ministries, and awards after special people. We do this not because particular names are so great but because we esteem the person who bears the name.

GOD’S KINGDOM: Matthew’s Gospel mentions the phrase *kingdom of heaven* thirty-two times.⁸ In its simplest description it is God’s perfect rule and reign through the person of Jesus. I love how Dallas Willard describes it, “The *kingdom* of God is the range of his *effective* will: that is, it is the domain where what he prefers is actually what happens.”⁹ I want to live within the realm of God’s preferences, don’t you? To better understand what the kingdom of heaven (which Matthew often refers to as “the kingdom of God”) is, we’ll look up some key passages.

Read the following verses about the kingdom of heaven:

Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17	What about the kingdom of heaven caused John the Baptist and Jesus to preach repentance?	
Matthew 4:23	What did Jesus travel around preaching?	
Matthew 6:33	Where is God’s kingdom supposed to sit in our daily priorities?	
Matthew 19:13-15	What is the disposition of those who make up the kingdom of heaven?	
Matthew 24:14	How far will the good news of the kingdom reach?	

The kingdom of heaven isn't an easy thing to grasp. "This must surely be why Jesus spoke of it in parables when trying to explain its nature. It's like a mustard seed, He said, yeast working its way through dough, a hidden treasure, a merchant seeking a priceless pearl, a fisherman's net! For all its complexities, it's good to be reminded that one way Jesus described the kingdom is simply that it is *good news*."¹⁰

GOD'S WILL: The term *God's will* refers to the "redemptive and moral intent of God for this world and for God's people."¹¹ When we pray for God's will, we're praying for Him to act.¹² We're also agreeing to work in accordance with His purposes so we can be active participants in what He's accomplishing on earth.¹³

I've often said that if not for God's Word the will of God would rarely occur to me. When someone hurts me, my immediate instinct is not to forgive. When my parents need my help because they've forgotten their computer passwords, patience is rarely my first inclination. Before understanding Jesus's teaching on generosity, I loved spending my money on myself. We could go on and on. When we pray for God's will, we're praying according to His Word. Jesus's entire Sermon on the Mount depicts His will, so if you're not sure what His will is in a certain situation, Matthew 5–7 is a wonderful place to go and reflect.

In what area of your life are you struggling to pray for God's will to be done? Look up that topic in the index of your Bible or do a topical search on your Bible app for a list of related Bible passages. Then, pick one that will help you pray for His will to be done in that area of your life. And when in doubt, simply pray Matthew 6:10.

Praying for God's rule and reign was much harder for me to pray when I was younger. This is at least partially due to the fact that my own will and kingdom are not nearly as enchanting as they once were. My unbridled will has gotten me into some painful situations, and ruling my own kingdom—which is a peaceless existence, a constant looking over my shoulder, a swirl of strife—isn't nearly as much fun as it sounds. This is one reason I find the Lord's Prayer so refreshing. At the very top of the prayer, we get to set the most important things in our lives straight: we want God's name to be glorified, His kingdom to come, and His will to be done, not our own. *We really do!* And if we don't, we pray to want to want it.

Verse 10 in Matthew 6 culminates most remarkably. We want God’s
renown and reign to be done on _____ as it is in _____.

Prayer can often seem so lofty that it’s detached from our real lives at school, home, or the office. We may not think of God being able to break into our singleness, marriage, parenting, friendships, health, or finances. But think of what Jesus is revealing here: As God’s perfect will is being worked in heaven, we are to pray for its inbreaking right here in our everyday lives. Because the kingdom of heaven is “at hand” or “has come near” through Christ, we have access to pray that all that is true in heaven will be made so on earth.

What is the most transformational truth about verses 9-10 of the Lord’s Prayer for you? Why?

Beginning our prayers by focusing on our own needs, priorities, and concerns is natural. But when we begin instead by lifting high the name and rule of God, we’re learning to live in the world the way God intended—as dependent children perfectly at rest in His care.



When You Pray Today

Write your own prayer that begins with a focus on the **name, kingdom, and will of God**. Make a point to begin with Him.

DAY THREE

OUR DAILY SUSTENANCE

Personal prayer is essential to our relationship with Christ, but I want to keep reminding you that the Disciple's Prayer was meant to be prayed in community. When you read the prayer today, pay special attention to the pronouns Jesus used: *our, us, we*. This doesn't mean we shouldn't pray it by ourselves—we should, and I often do, especially when I'm not sure what to pray. But as we continue to study this prayer, keep in mind its communal nature. I hope you will incorporate praying it together with your Bible study group if you're in one.

BEFORE WE GET INTO TODAY'S STUDY, THOUGHTFULLY READ MATTHEW 6:9-13, giving special attention to verse 11. Ask the Holy Spirit to remove anything from your heart and mind that would keep you from being able to hear Him.

Describe the way the focus of the prayer shifts in verse 11.

Why do you think beginning with the "Yours" and then moving to the "ours" is important when we pray? Give this some thought.

In verse 11, Jesus told us to pray for our daily_____.

My dad and brother have been making bread for several years now. Because I am nothing if not a firstborn, I recently joined their bread bandwagon and am now comparing loaves. I currently have two twenty-five-pound bags of grain, one of spelt, and one of hard red wheat berries in my pantry with a wheat mill sitting nearby. At this early stage in my bread career, I would not consider myself even a decent bread maker. I have yet to dabble in sourdough (regularly feeding your culture feels too much like having a puppy), and I don't have any fancy scales or

Before you begin today's study, pray **Psalm 119:18**,

Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction.

pans. But this one thing I can tell you: I have a slice of bread (or three) every morning with my coffee. I adore it.

The fact that I love bread, and you love bread, and we all love bread is not coincidental. It's an enduring, universal staple, which is why Jesus can cover so much real estate of need with just the words *daily bread*. Bread is a symbol of all we deem essential.

For Jesus's Jewish audience in particular, a prayer for daily bread would have also brought to mind a significant time period in Israel's history, a time when God uniquely provided.

Asking God to give us our "daily bread" not only communicates our dependence on Him to provide our basic needs, but it also reminds us to rely on Him for all of life's provisions.

HOLD YOUR PLACE IN MATTHEW AND READ

EXODUS 16:1-5. (This account took place shortly after the Israelites left the bondage of Egypt on their way to the promised land. They struggled in the in-between place of the wilderness, and one of their chief complaints to Moses had to do with their sparse provisions.)

What specifically did God provide for the Israelites in response, and how often did He provide it?

Literal bread, water, and shelter would have also been very real concerns for much of Jesus's first-century audience. And they remain primary concerns for so many in our world today. Whether I'm in the Amazon or Moldova with Justice & Mercy International—two very different cultures and geographical locations—I'm always sobered by how many people struggle to have their basic needs met. Most of us going through this study didn't wake up wondering if we would be able to eat today or if we'd have shelter. But asking God to give us our "daily bread" not only communicates our dependence on Him to provide our basic needs, but it also reminds us to rely on Him for all of life's provisions.

What does praying for daily bread mean to you? What does it represent in your life?

Some of the early church fathers, such as Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine, found the practical request for daily bread to be too great a leap from the petitions relating to God's glory that came before it.¹⁴ In other words, they didn't think our mundane needs fit alongside the prayers about God's greatness and kingdom. So they allegorized bread to mean either the Word of God or the Lord's Supper.

Two of the most renowned Reformers, Calvin and Luther, thought just the opposite. They interpreted daily bread literally, including anything that pertained to our basic needs and provisions. In this instance, I agree with the Reformers, and many others, who see the petition for daily bread as Jesus's way of acknowledging how important our physical needs are to our heavenly Father.¹⁵ To me, the vast leap between the glory of God and our physical need for sustenance only further emphasizes His loving condescendence toward us in the person of Jesus.

Something that will help us better understand what "daily bread" stands for is considering the context that surrounds the Lord's Prayer.¹⁶

READ MATTHEW 6:25-34. Even if this is a familiar passage to you, read it slowly, asking the Holy Spirit to administer these words to your heart.

What were Jesus's first-century listeners worried about (v. 25)?

Jesus alleviated their concerns by pointing to two different aspects of creation. What were they (vv. 26,28)?

What did Jesus tell His listeners to do in relation to the birds of the sky (v. 26)? (Hint: it's the first word of the verse.)

Some of your translations say *look*, *observe*, or *consider*. The Greek word means *to look intently*.¹⁷ In other words, we're to reflect on how the birds go about their lives, in particular, how they're fed.

What are the three activities birds don't do? Despite the fact that birds aren't capable of these three activities, what does our heavenly Father do for them?

Sowing, reaping, and storing are actions that have to do with our ability to plan. Every spring I sow seeds in my backyard garden. I check the seed packet for the section that tells me the days to maturity so I know when to reap the lettuce, kale, spinach, and tomatoes I've planted. Sadly, my little raised beds don't produce enough for me to store in barns (I'll let you know when I've reached that level), but if I could store them, I would. The point is that we humans have the faculties to plan, save, invest, and freeze the ground beef until we need it for lasagna. The birds can't do this! They live day-to-day, worm-to-appetizing-worm, not because of their planning abilities but because Creator God takes care of their needs.

If God provides for the birds who can't plan, harvest, or save, how does this encourage you as you pray for God to provide for your daily needs (daily bread)?

Jesus's next example of a wildflower's beauty is meant to be taken alongside the example of the birds.

The disciples were to "consider" the birds of the sky. What were they to do in relation to the wildflowers?

The CSB translation uses the word *observe* (v. 28). The Greek word means *to learn, examine closely, observe well*.¹⁸ When is the last time you sat for a moment and reflected on some flowers in a field, or from your cut garden, or from—let's be real—the bouquet you bought while getting onions and broccoli from the produce section of the grocery store? Let's consider what Jesus is teaching us.

Are flowers more or less capable than birds at providing for themselves? What can't flowers do for themselves (v. 28)?

What is Jesus's argument in verses 29-30? Put it in your own words.

Wildflowers are even less capable of doing for themselves than birds. Whereas birds can fly and gather food and build nests, flowers can't stitch a thread of clothing for themselves. Yet God dresses them even more beautifully than King Solomon. King Solomon was King David's son, the one who built God's holy temple. He was one of Israel's most renowned kings, known for his extraordinary wealth and wisdom. We can only imagine His spectacular clothes. For a modern-day comparison, think of your favorite, most beautifully dressed actress or performer.

Write down the rhetorical questions Jesus asked in verses 26 and 30.

To make His point, Jesus used "lesser to greater" reasoning, a form of argument common in ancient Jewish culture. If God generously feeds the birds and elaborately clothes the wildflowers (lesser), how much more important to Him are you and I (greater)?

Back to our theme of prayer, how do verses 25-34 help clarify what "give us today our daily bread" means (v. 11)?

Daily bread represents God's provision for our needs, which is different from our wants. I believe God delights in our asking for what we want so long as it's not in opposition to His will and ways of righteousness. But I do wonder how often we seek Him for daily wants instead of for daily needs. And how infrequently we thank Him for the countless times He meets our fundamental needs.

What falls under the category of "daily bread" that God has generously provided for you? Make a list and then thank Him for the tangible blessings you wrote down. I am always amazed at how powerful gratitude is in conquering a spirit of discontentment.

DAY FOUR

FORGIVE US AS WE FORGIVE

Forty-eight years after my parents founded Reston Bible Church in a friend's living room in Northern Virginia, we celebrated their last official Sunday. It was a surreal day in many respects. How do you honor nearly half a century of service on a single Sunday morning? Hundreds of friends and family members came out to celebrate, some of whom we've known for decades. The service was full of moving tributes to my parents, and the final video of images of church life that spanned forty-eight years did a number on my mascara. Despite my dignified attempts at holding it together, I could not contain my emotions for all the memories and people.

Looking around that room at all those faces, some of whom I've known since birth, I can tell you one thing: Take forgiveness out of the mix and the whole thing would have been over before it started. Yes, I'm of course talking about the forgiveness Jesus has given His people. But I'm also talking about the forgiveness we extend to one another as a result. The body of Christ can't exist without forgiveness flowing in and out of us. This is why verse 12 of the Lord's Prayer is so essential. Without seeking regular forgiveness from God, our relationship with Him is hindered. And without giving it and receiving it amongst ourselves, we can lose our most precious gift—each other.

READ MATTHEW 6:9-13, giving special attention to verse 12.

What do you think is the significance of Jesus placing daily bread and forgiveness next to each other in His prayer?

Perhaps you came up with something similar to John Stott, who wrote "Forgiveness is as indispensable to the life and health of the soul as food is for the body."¹⁹ Just as our physical needs must be met, so our relational ones need tending.

Before you begin today's study, pray **Psalm 119:18**,

Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction.

Does forgiveness feel as essential to you as your daily needs being met? Why or why not?

LOOK BACK AT VERSE 12. What two aspects of forgiveness are mentioned?

Notice that Jesus told us to forgive debtors instead of debts. In other words, we're called to forgive people, not their offenses. How does this distinction affect how you pray prayers of forgiveness?

I wonder what comes to mind when you think of the word *debt*. It may have something to do with an outstanding credit card balance or the mortgage on your home. Most of us would like to be debt *free*. Or maybe what comes to mind is a debt someone owes you. In Matthew's Gospel, *debt* is a metaphor for *sin*. When we sin against God, we owe Him a debt because sin is costly.

This is especially problematic for us as sinners because we're incapable of paying God the debt we owe. Here is where the astounding nature of the gospel comes in.

Look up the following references and answer their corresponding questions.

READ 1 PETER 1:18-19. Who paid our ransom and with what currency?

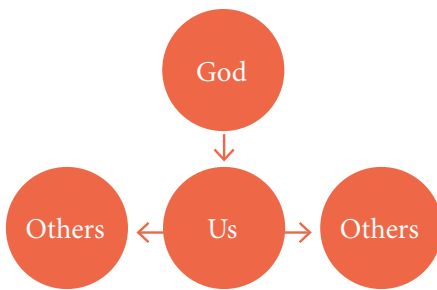
READ ROMANS 6:23. What is the wage or price of sin? And what is the free gift of God?

First John 2:2 says, "He himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world." The word *atonement* here in its simplest form means that Jesus took upon Himself the punishment that was due us.²⁰ He literally paid

the debt we owed God. When we come to Christ and receive the gift of His sacrifice for us, our debt is paid once and for all. God declares us righteous. This is called “justification.”

However, our “sanctification” is the process of us becoming more and more like Christ as we daily follow Him. And here’s where today’s part of the Lord’s Prayer comes in. When we sin against God and others, we’re to regularly seek His forgiveness, not for our salvation which is already secure in Christ, but for daily cleansing and renewal. This keeps our fellowship with Him free and unhindered.

Now that we’ve freshly reflected on the debt we’ve been forgiven, list any connections you see between receiving forgiveness from God and extending forgiveness to others.



A friend of mine who is quite open about her lack of belief in the Christian faith expressed to me her desire to forgive her parents for the pain they’d caused her as a child. “I want to forgive them; I just can’t do it,” she explained. She knew the fits of anger that crept up on her were unsustainable. She hated the wedge that unforgiveness put between her and her parents and between her kids and their grandparents. She wanted to be free of the burden but couldn’t lay it down.

Because I knew her aversion to Christ, I was racking my brain for a series of forgiveness steps, or a go-to book, but the thing that was remarkably clear to me is that genuine, lasting forgiveness isn’t possible without a relationship with the Forgiver. I don’t remember being terribly eloquent that day. We were both teary, and I stumbled in my responses, but I remember saying something along the lines of, “I can’t give you anything helpful about forgiveness apart from Jesus.” We really do need Jesus’s help to forgive.

Part of the way we show God we love Him is by forgiving others.

I don't always think of forgiveness in these terms, but LOOK UP 1 JOHN 4:9-10. How does this passage testify to this reality?

TURN BACK TO MATTHEW 6 and read verses 14-15.

If you forgive others, your heavenly Father will

_____.

If you don't forgive others, your heavenly Father won't

_____.

What do these verses tell us about the seriousness of forgiving those who have hurt us?

At first glance, it might seem as though Jesus was teaching that forgiving others is how we earn God's forgiveness. But we know from other portions of Scripture (such as Eph. 2:8-9) that salvation is God's gift to us through Jesus (we just saw this in 1 John 4:9-10). God's forgiveness isn't earned; it's received. At the same time, when we are transformed by Christ's lavish forgiveness of our sins, we will not want to go on harboring bitterness and revenge in our hearts toward those who have hurt us. Now unforgiveness may still feel most natural to us, especially if we have been deeply wounded by someone we loved and trusted. But in light of the forgiveness Jesus has given us, in light of His coming alongside us, we will aim to seek forgiveness even if it goes against our formidable feelings.

Later in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus told a parable about forgiveness that is helpful as we pray for the capacity to forgive others.

READ MATTHEW 18:21-35. How would you sum up Jesus's teaching on forgiveness here in one sentence? Write it below.

In verse 35, Jesus said we're to forgive others from our _____.

Why is forgiving from our hearts such a challenge?

Forgiveness isn't just something we do or words we say; it's a change that takes place within us. And it can be a process, especially if the wound is deep and the consequences long felt. C. S. Lewis says it well, "The real trouble about the duty of forgiveness is that you do it with all your might on Monday and then find on Wednesday that it hasn't stayed put and all has to be done over again."²¹ It's not that the forgiveness we determined in our hearts on "Monday" didn't count; it's that it can be like peeling an onion—there always seems to be another layer. This is why we need to daily come to Jesus. Only Jesus can change our hearts, which is why we can't forgive those who have deeply hurt us without Him.

Let's close by looking at Jesus's own prayer of forgiving others.

READ LUKE 23:32-34. Notice that Jesus didn't act alone. He involved His Father through prayer when it came to forgiving those who mocked and eventually crucified Him. How does Jesus's prayer impact your own prayers about forgiving others?

Reconciled and flourishing relationships is one of the central themes in Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, and we see it highlighted in the Lord's Prayer. Insofar as it lies with us, we don't want unresolved offenses hindering our fellowship with one another. Forgiving someone, or receiving their forgiveness, doesn't necessarily mean we'll be in relationship with that person. That's OK in many circumstances. But whenever it's possible, we want to be people who seek reconciliation and healing in our relationships (2 Cor. 2:5-11). God's forgiveness for His people and our forgiveness toward one another are what hold our relationships together.

DAY FIVE

DON'T LET US BE OVERWHELMED BY EVIL

As we reach the final portion of the Lord's Prayer, I hope you've gained a deeper understanding of each part and that by doing so your own prayers are more firmly grounded. We'll see the themes from Jesus's prayer surface over and over again as we study more prayers from the Bible over the next five sessions.

One of the ways I know I'm praying the Lord's Prayer and not my own is how much it doesn't sound like me in places. I don't mean I disagree with the words or I'm disconnected from the prayer's praises and pleas; it's just that, for example, my first instinct isn't usually to pray for things like protection from evil.

Let me be clear: It's not that I don't think evil exists or that I haven't come up against it at different times in my life. But I think I've been influenced into thinking that "evil" is just a little too dramatic of a word. Must we look for Satan behind every bush? Even for Christ-followers, we may identify with *deliver us from a Target shopping addiction, an extra slice of cheesecake at dinner, and sharing morsels of gossip at work*, but *evil* is just a lot more than what we often think of ourselves as having to contend with.

Yet the older I get, the more astounded I am by the brokenness and plain evil that pervades our life on earth. Wars and violence, racism, families torn apart by abuse and addiction, fraud, stealing, and the overwhelming darkness housed in our personal devices. Not to mention the sin that creeps out of my own heart and the struggles of life in a broken world. This is not to say we should live terrified of evil. Christ who lives within us is greater than the evil one who's working in the world (1 John 4:4). But we need to have our eyes open to the power of evil, to be sober-minded, to actively pray for deliverance from it.

Before you
begin today's
study, pray
Psalm 119:18,

*Open my
eyes so
that I may
contemplate
wondrous
things
from your
instruction.*

READ MATTHEW 6:9-13, giving special attention to verse 13. Fill out the two parts of this petition:

That God would not bring us into _____.

But _____ us from evil.

So that we can best understand what this means, let's consider some additional passages in Scripture.

READ JAMES 1:13-15. What did James say God will never do?

Where can being drawn away by temptation ultimately lead us?

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 10:13. What two things does Paul teach us about God's activity in our lives when we're tempted?

Given these additional passages, what do you think is the essence of what we're to pray for according to Matthew 6:13?

We must read Matthew 6:13 in light of the fact God doesn't tempt us to sin. This seems contradictory because the first part of the verse is a petition for God to not "bring us into temptation." But the second part, "but *deliver* us from evil" (emphasis mine), helps explain this. If the second half is a prayer to be rescued from evil, then it makes sense that the first half is a request that we not be overwhelmed by temptation which leads to evil. John Stott interprets it this way: "Do not allow us so to be led into temptation that it overwhelms us, but rescue us from the evil one."²²

Each of us knows our own weakness and tendency to sin. We know what entices us down detrimental paths. Some of my temptations are different from yours and vice-versa. So, when I pray this part of the Lord's Prayer, I'm asking my heavenly Father, my Protector, to

keep me from any temptation that would overwhelm me or take me under. Along these lines, I ask Him to deliver me from the sway of the evil one.²³

PRAY. *Without revisiting past sin in your life and without feeling like you have to be overly detailed, how would you finish this two-part prayer based on what you know about yourself?*²⁴

Heavenly Father, lead me not into . . .

Heavenly Father, deliver me from the evil one and his scheme of . . .

READ MATTHEW 7:7-11. Using this passage from later in the Sermon on the Mount for reference, take a moment to write about how different our heavenly Father is from the evil one. Probe beneath the surface.

This is a good time to differentiate between testing and temptation. Whereas the enemy's tempting is for our downfall, God's testing is always for our good.²⁵ As we just saw in Matthew 7:7-11, He is a good and trustworthy Father.

READ JAMES 1:2-4,12. What does the testing of our faith produce (vv. 3-4)?

What is the benefit of faithfully enduring trials (v. 12)?

How can you tell the difference between a trial and a temptation in your life? Be specific about how you know the difference.

We're to both pray to be delivered from evil as well as contend against it by living according to God's Word.

Trials and hardship, no matter their source, can strengthen our faith and deepen our relationship with Jesus. But temptation is something we should always flee because it can only lead to sin, destruction, and death. These may seem like big, bad Bible words, but it really is true. When temptation turns into sin, it can lead to the most awful places we could have never imagined ending up in. This is why we want to pray that we'll not walk into temptation but that God would rescue us from where it leads—evil. We don't want to play with temptation's fire or see how close we can get to it without actually sinning. We would never take such risks in other areas of our lives.

Let's close with one more passage of Scripture so we can see how Jesus Himself dealt with profound temptation.

READ MATTHEW 4:1-11. What was Jesus's primary defense in combating Satan's temptations?

That Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness indicates He was also praying since praying and fasting go hand in hand (see Neh. 1:4; Luke 2:37; Acts 14:23).²⁶ And His use of Scripture to contend with Satan's temptations was another weapon He used. Put simply, Jesus's knowledge of the Word and His praying the Word were two of His greatest protections against the evil one. It seems that Jesus was actively showing us how to walk out His prayer in Matthew 6:13. We're to both pray to be delivered from evil as well as contend against it by living according to God's Word.

Verse 13 of the Lord's Prayer has reawakened me to the seriousness of evil and temptation in my life and our world. I need to get this strong language back into my prayer rotation. I may wish that evil was something I could easily sweep under the carpet, but it is in fact pacing on top of the carpet, like a roaring lion looking for those it can devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

In what areas of your life do you need to be more prayerful regarding temptation and deliverance from the power of the evil one? Write down two or three specific areas where you can start putting this into practice.

We have studied the Lord's Prayer together so that it might become our own. And what a wonderful week it's been. We began by lifting high God's name (Matt. 6:9), and so it feels fitting to end with a similar affirmation included in the New King James Version of the Bible: "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (Matt. 6:13). As we continue our study of prayer together, may we learn to bring our praises and requests before the living God. To Him, and only Him, belongs the kingdom of heaven, all the power in the universe, and all the glory, forever and ever. Amen.



When You Pray Today

Close this week's study by putting **Matthew 6:13** into your own words and praying it back to the Lord. If you need help, you can use my words.

Personal Prayer: *Heavenly Father, don't allow life's burdens to be so heavy I give into sin. Don't let temptation be so great it overwhelms me. Instead, rescue me from evil and the evil one. For the power of darkness cannot begin to overcome the light You've placed within me. Help me participate with You in avoiding temptation, never playing with it. And when it springs on me without notice, hold me fast from sin, and ultimately deliver me from Satan's evil agenda in my life and this world.²⁷*

WATCH

SESSION TWO

Watch the Session Two video and take notes below.

**TO ACCESS THE VIDEO SESSIONS, USE THE INSTRUCTIONS
IN THE BACK OF YOUR BIBLE STUDY BOOK.**



