

Teach Us to Pray

The Practice of Prayer

Learning to pray from the Lord's Prayer and teachings of Jesus,
with practical application



By Jacqueline Wallace

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Acknowledgments

When Debbie asked me and my friend, Naomi, to present a workshop on prayer for the upcoming women's retreat, I knew immediately what we should present: a study of the Lord's Prayer, with built-in times of prayer. Over the prior year I had facilitated a women's Bible study of the Sermon on the Mount and had learned and gained so much from our study, which included studying the Lord's Prayer, I knew we should share these truths.

This study of the Lord's Prayer was originally designed to be a one-hour workshop at an annual women's retreat. Unfortunately, COVID-19 hit the States and suddenly there was no women's retreat. The manuscript was tabled, indefinitely.

Later in the year, Debbie suggested resurrecting the study with the hopes of presenting it in another format, perhaps online. It was then I decided the Bible study needed to be expanded and redesigned for a setting longer than a one-hour workshop. I did just that with encouragement from several people, whom I want to acknowledge here.

My thanks go to Debbie Haupt and Naomi Chow for the encouragement and valued insight to bring this Bible study out of hibernation and to a new level. It might otherwise still be buried in my files had they not had a vision of using it to minister to women.

Once the manuscript was nearing completion, I asked several other women from church to act as beta readers and to work with me to hone it. These ladies met with me online weekly for seven or eight weeks. Thank you, Carolyn Ward, Robin Smith, Lacey Grawe, and Hazel Chavez for your time and attention to the details of the lessons. Your insights, questions and suggestions are deeply appreciated.

Thanks are due my husband, Randy, for his assistance in areas where he has expertise and I do not, those of teaching and presenting. His insights and suggestions have been extremely helpful, bringing the content of this Bible study to the place where I now feel it is ready for sharing with others.

Finally, thanks to the Lord whom I serve for all his encouragement and prodding to make this Bible study something he can use to build up his church, to his praise and glory.

Introduction

He glanced once again at Jesus. When the Lord went off by himself, the disciples all knew he was praying, and they left him alone. The disciple made up his mind. This time he would ask, when Jesus was done praying, of course.

“Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples,” he said as soon as he saw an opening.

Apparently, Jesus thought that was a good idea, and commenced to teach his disciples to pray, just like John the Baptizer had done with his disciples.

Two thousand years later Jesus’ disciples, followers like us, still make the same request. We find his instructions recorded by both Matthew and Luke. Now we too may learn to pray the way Jesus taught his first disciples.

Before we start our study in the book of Matthew, however, in Lesson 1 we go much further back in history, to the impassioned and inspired poems of the psalmists, to observe and imbibe vital prerequisites for prayer. The Psalms will be our prayer book, the Spirit of God our holy Instructor.

Then in Lesson 2 of this study, we consider what Jesus taught about our motives in prayer, contrasting the attitude *not* to carry into prayer with the attitude we *are* to have in prayer. Finally, in Lesson 3, when Jesus says, “Pray, then, in this way ...,” we begin in earnest to learn the principles of praying Jesus taught and carry it on through Lesson 8.

All the Scripture references throughout this document are meant to be looked up, read, and considered. Although you are encouraged to look up all the references, if time is an issue for you, the minimum references to follow-up on are indicated by **bold** type.

Here’s an example taken from Lesson 1: “God lives in us by his Holy Spirit (John 14:16–17; **Ephesians 1:13–14**).” For the minimum reading, you would look up and read the

Ephesians reference. However, again, you are encouraged to look up both references. From these verses we learn what God has said. His words are our lesson material.

In the Bible there are many types of prayer, numerous examples of prayer, and more Jesus taught about prayer than just the Lord's Prayer. However, the scope of this study does not, and simply put, cannot include them all. Our focus here will be discovering what Jesus taught his followers about how to pray in the Lord's Prayer, and then putting his teachings into practice.

Armed with the Word of God, with the Spirit of God as our Teacher, we embark on this journey of learning to pray as Jesus taught. Appropriately, we begin with a prayer:

Open my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of your law.

(Psalm 119:18 ESV)

Words to Live By

Bible Study Group Etiquette

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.~ Jesus (John 15:12-13 NIV)

This is Jesus’ last command to his followers before his death. He emphasized this love¹ as he talked with them on their last evening together, and demonstrated it by washing their feet at their last meal together. Then he showed them that “greater love,” love’s ultimate expression, when he submitted to crucifixion and death, for them and for us all.

Though most of us don’t like to be told what to do, Jesus’ command to love one another falls on us now. And we must be very clear that it is a command, not a suggestion. We can show love for one another in a multitude of ways, from very easy to extremely risky. For your time together in this Bible study, you have the opportunity (and responsibility) to love one another in some rather easy ways by carrying out these simple guidelines. Read on.

Value each person in your little community of the Bible study group. Give each other the respect due them. Commit to:

1. Show up. Someone said that 90% of any task is just showing up. Be at the group meetings (barring an emergency). And when there, be present. “Be Here Now,” attentive and engaged in the moment. This is for your own benefit as well as the benefit of the others. You never know what God may speak to you through another person, or what God may impress on another through you. Sometimes you just being there is all the encouragement someone else needs (**Hebrews 10:24–25**).
2. Do your work. The week before you meet, do the work for the upcoming lesson in preparation for the group time. The more effort you put into the study, the more you will get out of it. Solomon said, “The soul (appetite) of the lazy person craves and gets nothing [for lethargy

¹ For a biblical understanding of Agape love, read 1 Corinthians 13.

overcomes ambition], but the soul (appetite) of the diligent [who works willingly] is rich and abundantly supplied” (**Proverbs 13:4 AMP**).

3. Be generous and share the discussion time. Be short-winded so others may also participate in the discussions (**1 Peter 5:5–7**).
4. Be quicker to listen than to give advice. Bible study discussions are not the place for advising or counseling. You are not meeting together to solve anyone’s problems but to learn what God has to say in his Word. “Understand this, my beloved brothers and sisters. Let everyone be quick to hear [be a careful, thoughtful listener], slow to speak [a speaker of carefully chosen words and], slow to anger [patient, reflective, forgiving]” (**James 1:19 AMP**).
5. Be trustworthy as you listen. Personal issues shared in the group discussions stay a secret with the group. These things are not to be told to anyone else. “He who goes about as a gossip reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy and faithful keeps a matter hidden” (**Proverbs 11:13 AMP**).
6. Be a Berean Christian. When questions come up, don’t default to traditional, current, or even “common sense” ideas, but search the Scriptures like the Bereans did to find out what God has to say about the issue. He does have a word to say about it. And, unlike the words of men, God’s Word endures forever (**Acts 17:10–12**; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 Peter 1:22–25).

These are easy, yet thoughtful ways we can love one another in any group setting and these few guidelines will serve as our standard of etiquette for this Bible study group.

Enjoy your time together!

Lesson 1

Prerequisites for Prayer

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.³⁸ This is the great and first commandment.”

(Matthew 22:37 – 38 ESV)

(Follow Instructions for the Prayer Time on page 14 as you begin this lesson.)

As we begin, let me clarify that the Lord’s Prayer is designed for his *disciples*, those who have committed themselves to God through faith in Jesus Christ. We all had to come to God in humility and enter salvation by faith, through the narrow gate of truth. We cry out to God in repentance and faith and God graciously hears those cries of the heart – the thoughts and prayers – of those who are seeking him for salvation.

This study deals not with those initial prayers for salvation but with the prayers of those of us who, having stepped through that narrow gate of truth, by faith are walking that strait, circumscribed road with Christ (Matthew 7:13 – 14). The Lord’s Prayer is for Christ’s followers so that we may “grow in respect to salvation,” as Peter says (1 Peter 2:2), and especially in the sphere of prayer.

Prerequisite 1: Relationship with God

First, let’s define what prayer is. Very simply, prayer is communicating with God. God talks to us in his Word and by his Spirit. We talk to him in prayer. *Prayer presumes a relationship with God*, entered into by faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, by which we are born from above into the family of God. God is our heavenly Father; we are his children. Relationship: This is the first prerequisite for prayer (**1 Peter 1:3; Hebrews 2:9 – 15**).

Prerequisite 2: Fellowship with God

When we think about communicating with God we intuit that prayer must be deeper, richer, and more meaningful than just words spoken by our mouths or minds to Someone out there, and we would be right in that intuition. Because of our relationship

with God – we his children and he our Father in heaven – there can and should be a deeper, richer, and more meaningful aspect of prayer that goes beyond just talking to God. We can *commune* with him, an intimate form of communication coming from our hearts, because *prayer, being rooted in relationship with God, blossoms through fellowship with God*. Communing with God is part of being “with” God, practicing his Presence, living in the knowledge of “God with us” all day, every day.

Far from being intimidating, living in the consciousness of the Presence of God is comforting and empowering. It was Adam and Eve’s initial experience of God in Eden and his intention for mankind. Before they sinned, Adam and Eve walked and talked with God daily in the Garden. Communing with God as we live in his Presence is fundamental to fellowship with God (**Genesis 3:8a**), which enriches our prayer life.

Nurture A Heart for God

“Lord, I’m at the same old place again. I just can’t do this. These people and their needs have to be in my heart when I pray for them, not just words on my prayer list where I tick them off one by one. That’s not praying. Help me, Lord!”

I distinctly remember when, as a college student, I cried out this way in frustration to God. My “prayer life” wasn’t working. I would make my prayer list and start my prayers by asking God this and that for so-and-so, and I meant it wholeheartedly. This would last for a day or two, but time after time my fervor would dwindle into mechanical words read from a list. I knew I had to pray with my heart, but I didn’t know how to maintain the transfer from my head to my heart. I sincerely yearned to communicate with God and effect change through prayer on behalf of others in need, yet I usually ended up feeling that I was falling short. I didn’t know what to do about it, so I did the only thing I did know to do: I asked God to help me.²

²Jacqueline Wallace, *Brokenness to Beauty: Transforming Your Brokenness into a Beautiful Life*, page 73.

Have you ever felt this way? Have you felt frustrated and as though your prayer attempts are all futile? I have many times, but God answered that prayer I prayed as a college student. A few years later I learned to approach God first with Adoration, *focusing my attention on God* and worshiping, adoring, and standing in awe of him *before* jumping into asking him for anything. It was the turning point in my prayer life. I had found the missing gem of prayer: focus on God.

A vital aspect of fellowship with God is *a heart of love and longing for God*. But how do we get that? As the worship hymnal of the Bible, the Psalms are a wonderful place to nurture such a heart of love and longing for God. Many psalms begin with and maintain a focus on God, acknowledging and praising him for who he is and for his wonderful works. This instructs us to pray the same way: *begin prayer with a focus on God, worshiping him, and maintaining that focus for the duration of our prayer*.

There are many psalms we can adopt as our own. By that I mean, when you read a psalm that resonates with you, make that psalm your own heart's cry and prayer to God.

We can also adapt a psalm. The right way to do that is to take the basic truths verbalized in the psalm and apply them to our present-day situation, making them our own heart's prayers, even if the truths are couched in cultural terms which are foreign to us.

We adapt psalms this way all the time; think Psalm 23. "The Lord is my Shepherd." Unless you are a shepherd, you're not going to be familiar with the terms of shepherding. But we know what the writer, David, the shepherd King, was getting at when he called the Lord his shepherd. As a non-shepherd we might say, "the Lord is my Guide, Protector, and Provider"; a shepherd does these, among other things. When we apply the truths of Psalm 23 and other Scriptures to ourselves, we can take great comfort in them. This is what is meant by rightly adapting (correctly interpreting and then applying) a psalm for ourselves, making it our own prayer or declaration.

What must be emphasized is this: *we need to embrace the heart of the psalmists*. See how their hearts cried out for God! They loved him. They longed to be with him, to be in his presence. They trusted God absolutely. This should become the state of our own hearts: crying out for God, loving him, desiring to be with him, and trusting him with absolute abandon.

For those of us who believe the good news of Jesus Christ and are putting our faith in him for our eternal salvation, God lives in us by his Holy Spirit (John 14:16–17; **Ephesians 1:13–14**). This is not to say we are God because he lives in us. We are, however, the temple of God, his resting place, individually and corporately with other believers (2 Chronicles 6:41; **1 Corinthians 6:17–20**; **1 Peter 2:4–5**).

Our bodies should be a welcome haven for the Spirit of God. We should create a healthy habit of acknowledging who he is, nurturing a heart of love and absolute surrender to God our heavenly Father.

Tragically, we all too often live as though we are too busy for God, that He doesn't figure in our lives, unless we need something, that is. Busyness is the soul-sickness of our age.

How often have you felt you just didn't have the time to spend with God alone? Most of us will agree we do need to exert energy to *make* time to spend focusing on God because it will not otherwise happen. We live in a noisy, demanding world, and must be intentional to make the time to come aside and train our minds and hearts to focus on God. *Spending time with God, focusing on him, using a psalm to tune our hearts to worship him, thanking and praising him, is how to nurture a deep love and longing for God.*

The point of it is *to be with God* in those moments, and learn to *be with him* throughout each day, whatever our tasks or responsibilities; this is practicing the Presence of God and is the underpinning of true fellowship with God.

It was the quiet hour before my eight-month-old son should wake up, the sun just starting to peep over the horizon; the perfect time to read my Bible.

“Mommy!” his little voice called.

Oh no, I lamented. He’s already awake!

“Lord, how can I be spiritual when he won’t even let me read my Bible?”

Yes, I actually said that to God! Of course, I was immediately smitten with conviction, a chuckle of embarrassment in my throat colliding with my frustration; a mental image of God softly laughing and shaking his head.

There are times in our lives, sometimes years long, when it is hard to snatch a few minutes to read the Bible or focus on anything but the task at hand. God knows this. He understands. At the same time, that doesn’t mean he lets us become slack in our commitment to be with him. When we persist in seeking the Lord, desiring to know him better, and walk in his ways, we will find our way, even though it is by grabbing snatches of time here and there to read our Bible and pray, stutter-stepping to keep pace with our heavenly Father’s patient steps guiding us.

A heart of love and longing for God is necessary for true worship and true prayer, for experiencing more than names or words on a prayer list. Worship and prayer are inextricably entwined; they cannot be separated. Worship and prayer flow naturally from love for God. True worship from true worshipers is rooted in and flows from our hearts, our spirits. Devoid of our heart and spirit involvement, prayer is hollow, futile, and powerless (Matthew 15:1 – 9).

Jesus revealed to the woman at the well, who was confused about who and where to worship, “the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and *those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*” (John 4:23 – 24 NKJV, emphasis added).

As this love and longing for God grows and becomes part of our spiritual DNA, our prayers will come alive. Sometimes we need to give ourselves time to grow in that love, so we must nurture this heart of love for God every day.

Habits to Live By

The habits of our lives can move us in the direction of loving and obeying God, habits such as 1) spending time each day in the Scriptures, 2) rereading, 3) meditating on it, and 4) putting God's Word into practice. 5) Start with a psalm to tune your heart to God, 6) learning who God is, 7) what he does, and 8) observing how the psalmists worshiped him. 9) Borrow the words and phrases of Scripture for your own worship and prayer times with the Lord. 10) Be creative and post a verse or two on a mirror or above the kitchen sink to read and memorize, or 11) listen to recorded Scripture.

In this way we train our hearts to worship him in spirit and truth, loving God with all our being: heart, soul, mind, and body. We learn to focus on God, snatching the moments of time for eternity.

Reading God's Word daily, meditating on it, and doing it is how God instructed his leaders, including kings, to live their lives so that they would learn to fear the Lord and be successful in all they did. If God said they would be blessed by doing those things day after day, certainly you and I will be too (**Deuteronomy 17:14 – 15, 18 – 20; Joshua 1:8**).

These habits will transform your life and your prayer life, as your focus on God becomes second nature. Your spontaneous prayers will sound more like the psalmist's prayers, filled with love, honor, and praise of God.

Hindrances to prayer

- Doubting God (**James 1:5 – 8**) and
- Holding on to sin (**Isaiah 59:2**)

What are the remedies for these hindrances?

Doubt: Exercise faith in God to combat doubt. You don't need a lot of faith; you simply must use what you have, putting your focus on the faithful God (**Matthew 17:19–20**). Without faith you cannot please God (**Hebrews 11:6**).

- Sin: Confess and forsake sin (Proverbs 28:13; **1 John 1:9**; Galatians 6:7–8; **Hebrews 12:1–2**).

So then, what are the prerequisites for a vital prayer life?

1. A relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.
2. A growing fellowship with God as you learn to know him better each day, loving and longing to be with him, practicing his Presence, and living in obedience to his ways.
3. Dealing with hindrances to prayer. Exercise faith in the faithful God and keep 'fessed up, that is, immediately confess and repent of sin when you become aware of it so no barriers between you and God can build up.
4. Making healthy habits to live by: read Scriptures daily, starting with a psalm; meditate on and memorize Scripture; use Scripture in your prayers; put the Scriptures into practice.

Questions for Study

1. Reflect on your prayer life. Would you say it represents a commitment to communing with God, or a time of merely presenting a list of things for God to do?
2. Identify three things you want to put into practice to transform your prayer time to a time of communion with God (review suggestions above in the lesson, especially Habits to Live By).
3. In the Prayer Time on the following pages, read Psalm 84 and turn its content into a personal prayer to God. After doing this, record how the content of the psalm spoke to you personally.

WHAT *joy* for those
whose **STRENGTH**
comes from the Lord,
who have **SET THEIR MINDS**
on pilgrimage to
JERUSALEM.

when they walk **THROUGH**
the valley of weeping,
it will become *Refreshing*
a place of *springs*

The autumn rains
will clothe it with **Blessings**
they will continue to

GROW STRONGER
and each of them will appear
before God in Jerusalem.

psalm 84:5-7

Prayer Time: Learn by Doing – Just Pray

Instructions: Every day this week, prayerfully, humbly, and thoughtfully pray through Psalm 84, quoted below. *Make it your own prayer.* Don't worry about phrases you don't understand. Focus on those that you do understand. Picture the scenes, enter into the emotions of the psalmist: joy, delight, wonder, adoration, longing. Recognize you are in the Presence of God, focus on him. He will teach you as you spend time with him.

Nurturing a Heart for God

Psalm 84

How lovely are Your dwelling places, O Lord of hosts!

² My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord;

My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

³ The bird also has found a house,

And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young,

Even Your altars, O Lord of hosts, My King and my God.

⁴ How blessed are those who dwell in Your house!

They are ever praising You. (Selah.)

⁵ How blessed is the man whose strength is in You,

In whose heart are the highways to Zion [the place where Gods dwells]!

⁶ Passing through the valley of Baca [Weeping] they make it a spring; Joy in sorrow

The early rain also covers it with blessings.

⁷ They go from strength to strength, Isaiah 40:31

Every one of them appears before God in Zion.

⁸ O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; Give ear, O God of Jacob! (Selah.)

⁹ Behold our shield, O God,

And look upon the face of Your anointed [appointed leader].

¹⁰ For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside.

I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness. Joshua 24:14-15

¹¹ For the Lord God is a sun and shield;

The Lord gives grace and glory;

No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.

¹² O Lord of hosts,

How blessed is the man who trusts in You! (bracketed comments added)

Faith is something you do, not merely profess.

(James 2:14—26)

Daniel Rickett

Lesson 2

Practicing Righteousness: Doing What Is Right

(Follow Instructions for Prayer Time on page 20 as you begin this lesson.)

Prayer: Doing What Is Right and Doing It Right

In Matthew 6:1 Jesus says, “Be careful not to *practice your righteousness* in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven” (NIV). Then he proceeded to give three examples of what he means by “practicing your righteousness,” prayer being one of them, which will be our focus.

According to Jesus, prayer is part of living righteously, doing what is right. A *prayerless life* is incompatible with a *righteous life*. Prayer is *assumed behavior* for the believer in Jesus Christ. It is our mode of communicating with God, it brings us into his very Presence. But beware, there is a danger even in our approach to prayer.

The Audience of One

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:5–6 NIV).

The horror of sin and our sinful nature is that sin brazenly tries to worm its way even into the presence of God in our prayers! And equally horrendous is that we usually aren’t even aware of it. But Jesus, fully aware of our tendency to be duped by our own deceitful hearts (**Jeremiah 17:9–10**), warns us in Matthew 6:5–6 (quoted above) not to pray to bring attention to ourselves or use it as an activity through which we seek praise from people. Whether we pray alone or in the presence of others—and there are legitimate times for public prayer—we must guard against the desire to want to please other people and gain their approval. The *only one we must be concerned about pleasing is our Heavenly Father*. Pray to the Audience of One. His “Well done” is all we should seek.

The private place of prayer (Matthew 6:6), be it a closet, a prayer chair, or my current favorite – our patio in the early morning before daylight – is for the purpose of getting alone with God. We shut *out* others for the sake of shutting ourselves *in* with the One.³

It is a struggle to focus our attention, so we must make every effort to bring our minds and hearts under control to put our attention on God alone. No matter how many times you must lasso your thoughts and bring them back to the feet of our Lord, do it! It is worth the effort because *he* is worth it.

Remember, too, Jesus is giving us here a *principle* about prayer: seek *only* God's approval, not that of other people. The illustration of the private place of prayer is both literal (I go to my dark and private patio in the early morning to meet with my Father) and can also be applied to prayer in the presence of others. Jesus is not teaching we cannot pray with others or in public. He is teaching us that our focus in prayer, public or private, must be on God alone; we pray for his ears only. It is first a state of the heart, then a state of the body. When Jesus prayed, I can guarantee you *his heart* was in "the private place" seeking God only, whether he was alone on the mountain or in the midst of the clamoring crowd.

Seeking him alone is true fellowship with our Father in heaven. This is what we want to develop in our lives. This is our approach to our Father in heaven, the Audience of One, whenever we pray, privately or publicly. Before you pray, take a moment to quiet your heart and mind; focus on God, not yourself or your requests.

Simplicity in Prayer

⁷ "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans [unbelievers without the knowledge of God], for they think they will be heard because of their many words.⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matthew 6:7–8 NIV).

³ An excellent related article, "Finding Your Tent of Meeting" by Kim Butts at <https://www.harvestprayer.com/finding-your-tent-of-meeting/>

Matthew records Jesus' emphasis that God our Heavenly Father, better even than a good earthly father, can be trusted to take care of our physical needs, so we need not worry about them (food, drink, housing, clothing, etc.). In fact, we are emphatically commanded *not* to worry about these things but to simply ask God to meet our needs and trust him to do it (**Matthew 7:7–11**). Jesus said to spend our life energy in pursuit of God's purposes, his kingdom and righteousness, and he would meet our material needs. We are to live like we know, trust, and obey the Lord, not like those around us who don't know the Lord and are full of worry, anxiety, and fear (Matthew 7:7–11; **Luke 12: 15, 22–34**).

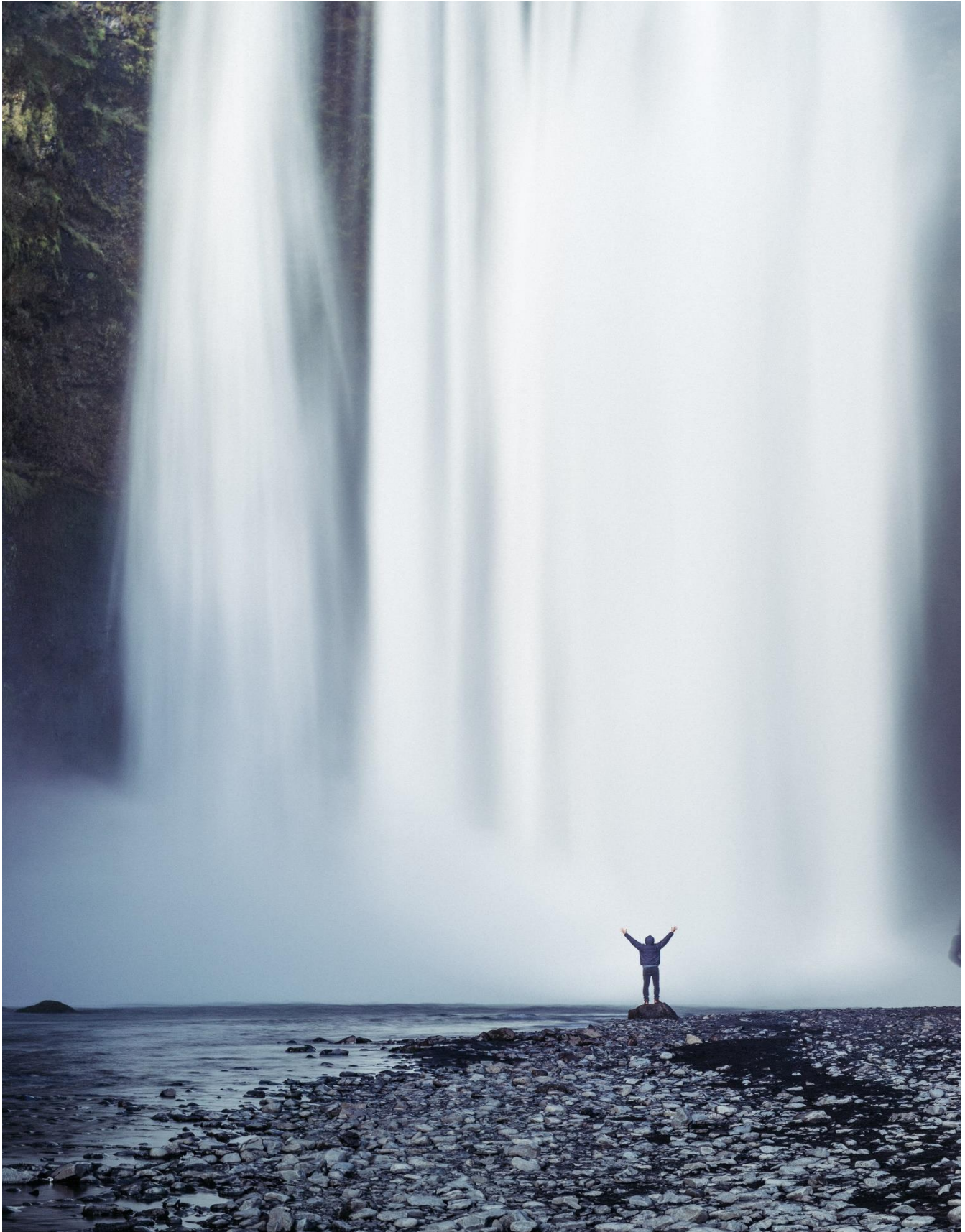
If we would take a moment to acknowledge that God graciously meets more of our needs every day than we realize, it should cause us to be grateful rather than anxious. If we are honest with ourselves, we would acknowledge our tendency is to be blind to, unaware of, and ungrateful for the goodness of God. The Word of God reminds us to be aware of God's goodness, which stirs up gratefulness in our hearts (**Psalms 107**), and gratefulness stirs up awareness of God's goodness and presence (Psalm 34:1).

Practicing Righteousness

1. Pray to an Audience of One, our Father in heaven. It is his reward and approval we really want.
2. Trust and simply ask God, our heavenly Father, to meet your needs, and put his Kingdom interests first.

Questions for study

1. Read through Psalm 34 in this lesson's Prayer Time. What does this psalm teach you about God; what is God like? These are his attributes. List them.
2. What does this psalm teach you about the kind of person God listens to, responds to, and is pleased with? What will you do to become that person?



Pray to an Audience of One.

Prayer Time: Prayer – Practicing Righteousness

Instructions: Each day this coming week, read through this psalm slowly and thoughtfully, making it your own prayerful proclamation; embrace the psalmist's words. Remember, you are praying to the Audience of One, our Father in heaven. Trust him to meet you in prayer, bless his name, putting his Kingdom interests first in your mind, heart, and words.

After praying through the psalm for a few days, take a highlighter and mark the *action words and phrases*. These are things the psalmist *did*, e.g., “I sought the Lord...” v.4. Compile a list of these words and phrases. Begin to incorporate these into your life.

Psalm 34

I will bless the Lord at all times;

His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

(Psalm 50:14-15, 23; Hebrews 13:15)

² My soul will make its boast in the Lord;

(Jeremiah 9:23-24)

The humble will hear it and rejoice.

³ O magnify the Lord with me,

And let us exalt His name together.

⁴ I sought the Lord, and He answered me,

And delivered me from all my fears.

⁵ They looked to Him and were radiant,

And their faces will never be ashamed.

⁶ This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him

And saved him out of all his troubles.

(Romans 10:13)

⁷ The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him,

And rescues them.

(Psalm 5:12)

⁸ O taste and see that the Lord is good;

How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

⁹ O fear the Lord, you His saints;
For to those who fear Him there is no want. (Psalm 23)

¹⁰ The young lions do lack and suffer hunger;
But they who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing. (Isaiah 40:28-31)

¹¹ Come, you children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the Lord. (Proverbs 1:7)

¹² Who is the man who desires life
And loves length of days that he may see good?

¹³ Keep your tongue from evil
And your lips from speaking deceit.

¹⁴ Depart from evil and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it.

¹⁵ The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous
And His ears are open to their cry.

¹⁶ The face of the Lord is against evildoers,
To cut off the memory of them from the earth.

¹⁷ The righteous cry, and the Lord hears
And delivers them out of all their troubles.

¹⁸ The Lord is near to the brokenhearted
And saves those who are crushed in spirit. (Isaiah 57:15)

¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
But the Lord delivers him out of them all. (John 16:33)

²⁰ He keeps all his bones,
Not one of them is broken.

²¹ Evil shall slay the wicked,
And those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

²² The Lord redeems the soul of His servants,
And none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned. (Romans 8:1)

Introduction to the Lord's Prayer

Most recognize Matthew 6:9–13 as a Model or Pattern prayer. In it, Jesus teaches us *principles* by which to pray. Consistent with teaching *principles*, the prayer is short and to the point. We are given a framework made of the principles, which correspond to each focus point below; through praise and petition, we fill in the prayer with the personal details of the joys or burdens on our hearts.

"Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

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

"Give us this day our daily bread.

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

"And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil.

[For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.](Matthew 6:9–13)

Five Focus Points of The Lord's Pattern Prayer:

1. **Focus on God:** Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.
2. **Focus on God and His Kingdom Priorities:** Your Kingdom come, Your will be done.
3. **Focus on God our Provider:** Give us this day our daily bread.
4. **Focus on God the Merciful and Just Judge:** Forgive us, as we forgive.
5. **Focus on God our Protector and Deliverer:** Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

We will study and pray through this pattern prayer phrase by phrase, learning from Jesus the principles of how to pray—to whom we pray and what to pray—just as his disciples did 2000 years ago.

Lesson 3

Focus on God

“Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” (Matthew 6:9)

To whom do we pray? “Our Father who is in heaven ...”

Since we worship the Triune God, one God in three Persons, it is of primary importance to know to whom we should address our prayers. Jesus said we pray to our Father – his Father and ours – who is in heaven. We pray:

- to the Father (Matthew 6:9; **Colossians 1:3, 9–13**; 1 Thess. 1:2–3),
- in the Name and Authority of our Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:11–13; **16:23–24, 26–27**),
- and we pray in the Spirit (John 14:16–17, 20, 26; **Romans 8:26–27**; 2 Corinthians 1:21–22; **Ephesians 6:18**).

Who is our focus in Prayer?

Our Father who is in heaven, the best Abba (Daddy) on the block (or the universe, for that matter), is our focus in prayer. Who is this God? What is he like? What does he do? Avoid the fatal error of thinking God is just like us. Look for him in the Bible. In the Old Testament he declares himself over and over.

“And [God] passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD [YHWH], the LORD, the *compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,*⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and *forgiving* wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet *he does not leave the guilty unpunished ...*” (Exodus 34:6–7a NIV, emphasis and bracket added)

Look for God in the New Testament as well. God “in these last days has spoken to us in his son” (Hebrews 1:2). Jesus said those who knew him, would know the Father (**John 14:7**). Study Jesus in the Gospels and you’ll know what God the Father is like. A quick scan through the epistles of the New Testament will reveal that almost every letter opens

with praise to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, such as Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church, which echoes the declaration in Exodus 34, quoted above.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of *compassion* and the God of all *comfort*." (2 Corinthians 1:3 NIV, emphasis added)

This gracious, compassionate, merciful, patient, forgiving, and just God has come near to us in Jesus Christ and desires to be our Father and us to be his children. Through Jesus Christ, and by faith in him, God has made his Fatherhood to us a reality, by giving us new birth through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1Peter 1:3).

This astounding relationship of Father and child, a reality beyond our comprehension, demands we hallow and worship his Name, honoring him and acknowledging that he is holy and worthy of all our worship and praise. Therefore, we say:

Hallowed be Your name

Our Father in heaven is the *one and only true God*, the Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth and everything in them (Psalm 146:6). He is the

Infinite,

Eternal,

Unchanging,

Inscrutable,

Holy,

Just and Righteous God.

God's ways and thoughts and plans are infinitely higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8–9). May your Name be "hallowed" means worshiped, held in honor. We exalt and worship

him in spirit and truth for the holy God he is. We give him the glory due his name, not just in words but *by our lives*, for he (alone) is Worthy (**Romans 12:1; Revelation 5:13**)!

We come to our Father God in prayer, humble and dependent as his children, with full trust in him. We focus our attention on this great, all Powerful God ... who also happens to be our loving Father in heaven. What comfort is in these words:

For this is what the high and exalted One says – he who lives forever, whose name is holy: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.” (Isaiah 57:15 NIV)

May we never forget that the **focus in prayer is God, not us**, or even our needs. This is why it is so crucial to develop a heart of love and longing for God; the psalms train us to know and love our God, fixing our eyes on him.

“Our eyes should be taken off self, removed from our own weakness and allowed to rest implicitly upon God’s strength.” (E.M. Bounds)

Being in a **new relationship** with the Almighty God – he our Father, and we his children – *we do not have to fear* approaching him for he waits for and desires us to come to him. We can draw close to him as children do to their beloved daddy (Matthew 19:14; **Hebrews 4:13–16**). All these things should cause us to bow in worshipful awe of the God of grace and mercy!

Questions for Study

1. Return to Psalm 34 at the end of Lesson 2 (page 20). Take a sheet of paper and list what you previously identified about *what it taught about the Person of God, his attributes*. Slowly review the list and think of how each attribute (what God is like) has meaning for you and write it out like this:

Because God is _____, I can be_____.

Sample:

Because God is All-knowing, I can be confident in his guidance.

2. During the Prayer Time at the end of this lesson, use this same list of God's attributes to guide you in giving glory to God for who he is.

*“Speak to Him thou, for He hears, and Spirit
with Spirit can meet— Closer is He than
breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.”*

—Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Prayer Time: Focus on God

Use your own words but also use the words of Scripture, such as psalms, to speak to our Father. You can use the Scriptures above in the lesson and those below in the prayer prompts. Use your list of God's attributes /character traits to praise God for who he is. Do not rush; spend time learning to "be" in God's presence, worshiping and adoring him.

Praise God for who he is and what he does, as he has revealed himself in Scripture; **honor his name as holy**, worship only him.

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens. (Psalm 8:1)

Thank him for being the high and exalted God he is, but also the God who is with the contrite and lowly, to revive them (Isaiah 57:15).

To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

²O my God, I trust in You;

Let me not be ashamed;

Let not my enemies triumph over me.

³Indeed, let no one who waits on You be ashamed. (Psalm 25:1 – 3a NKJV)

Thank him for this great salvation through Jesus Christ, in which we stand.

Thank him for his mercies and grace toward us; for forgiving our sins; for adopting us into his family, making us his children; for giving us his Holy Spirit; and for his goodness to us every day.

"Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. ⁴ Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." (Revelation 15:3 – 4 NIV)

Lesson 4

Focus on God and His Kingdom Priorities in Life

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10)

“Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” (Mark 1:14 – 15, emphasis added)

Defining the Kingdom of God

The “believe the gospel” part of what Jesus preached we have heard and believe. As born-again believers in Jesus Christ, we acknowledge the truth of God’s gospel: that we are sinners in need of the Savior, who alone is Jesus, God’s Son (Acts 4:10-12).

But what about the first part of Jesus’ proclamation: “the time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand.” What is he talking about? What is the Kingdom of God? And what does it mean for us both in life and in prayer? In the next two lessons, Lesson 4 and Lesson 5, we will answer these questions.

First, what is the Kingdom of God? The Kingdom of God (also called the Kingdom of Heaven) is, simply put, the domain or area of the rule of God. Every follower of Jesus is a Kingdom person under the rule of God. **The focus of our lives, therefore, should be on God; his kingdom and his righteousness**, which righteousness we live out in obedience to God’s Word.

In the garden of Eden (Genesis 1 and 2), we see a picture of what God’s Kingdom and rule looked like in the earliest days of human history. Visualize it as you read this quote from the book, *Mission as Life*:

They [Adam and Eve] had communion with God, they experienced a loving relationship with one another, and they had meaningful work that supplied all they needed for daily life. They lived in a virtual paradise, a peaceful setting.

This was part of the King's dominion (God's rule), His Kingdom. This early section of Genesis presents the first look at how God intended people to live in relation to Him, His creation and with one another. The dominant themes of harmony, meaning, significance through work, security, community, and relationship with God are present. These same images were used later in scripture to typify what God ultimately referred to as Shalom,⁴ the word translated peace through most of the Old Testament. Peace in this context meant more than merely an absence from conflict (although that is certainly included); it inferred a state of total harmony and well-being physically, spiritually, socially, emotionally, psychologically, economically and politically.⁵

Shalom has always been God's desire and intention for all mankind. Man was made to rule on the earth under the authority of God and shalom is what his kingdom and rule will bring. However, because of sin's entrance into our world, everything changed.

The Kingdom Now and Coming

Considering human nature, fallen and sinful as it is, we can understand why God's kingdom is both a spiritual kingdom and a physical kingdom. It is a spiritual kingdom because the inner person of our hearts must first change. Jesus said, "blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). We must humble ourselves before the Lord, seeking his salvation and shalom. First comes peace *with* God through faith in Jesus Christ (**Romans 5:1**) and then the peace *of* God will be ours as we seek the things of God, being spiritually minded as opposed to fleshly minded the way we were

⁴ "Shalom" is taken from the root word shalam, which means, 'to be safe in mind, body, or estate.' ... Although it can describe the absence of war, a majority of biblical references refer to an inner completeness and tranquility." (FIRM: Fellowship of Israel Related Ministries <https://firm.org.il/learn/the-meaning-of-shalom/>)

⁵ J.R. Wallace, *Mission as Life*, pg. 70

before coming to Christ (**Romans 8:1 – 18**). God's reign and shalom begin within.

The Kingdom of God is also a physical kingdom becoming visible in the world in two ways. The final way God's kingdom will be fully visible is when Christ physically returns to earth and establishes his rule. But in the meantime, before he returns, God's kingdom becomes visible in our world as we, the people of God, take it into the world *by our behavior every day*—in our homes, at our jobs, and wherever we go. When our behavior reflects the values and characteristics of the King and Kingdom of God, such as mercy and peace-making, people see the Kingdom of God fleshed out through us. And we will receive back blessings from God as Jesus taught, “blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy ... blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:7, 9). Peace, personal well-being, and the promise of God's blessings are for those who put their faith in Christ and live in obedience to the Lord.

The King of the Kingdom and His Kids

Jesus taught us about the Kingdom of God in his Sermon on the Mount and through numerous parables of the Kingdom. One of those parables described the kingdom as a tiny seed that grew up into a tree large enough to shelter the birds of the air (Matthew 13:31 – 32). By this he revealed that even those on the periphery of God's kingdom benefit from it, like the birds who made their nests in the parable's tree.

Despite the presence of sin, wherever God's Word has been lived out by people, eventually influencing nations, we see many benefits to mankind that otherwise would not have come about, such as the establishment of educational institutions, libraries, hospitals, medical advances, care for the sick and dying, care of orphans and the poor and needy, and much more.⁶When Jesus Christ returns to earth, God will rule fully and forever in his kingdom. Numerous Scriptures point to that day when Jesus Christ will rule on the earth subduing Satan's kingdom of darkness as well as all human kingdoms (Revelation 11:15; 18:1-10; 16-24; 19:1-16). Christ will mete out true justice, rooting out

⁶ Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book that Made Your World*, various pages; and *This Book Changed Everything*, pg. 47.

injustice so all people can live in shalom (**Psalm 145:10–13**; Daniel chapters 2 and 7: prophetic visions of the coming eternal kingdom of God overcoming every earthly kingdom; 1 Corinthians 15:20, 24–28; **Revelation 11:15**).

“And He will judge between many peoples and render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift a sword against nation, and never again will they train for war. Instead, each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree, with no one to make them afraid, because the mouth of the Lord of armies has spoken” (Micah 4:3–4).

This is what God’s Kingdom looks like: Shalom. It is personal and societal peace and well-being, justice, righteousness, and mercy. These things God delights in (**Jeremiah 9:23–24**) and are characteristics of God and his Kingdom.

As God’s Kingdom people, we are called to a high standard of behavior (**Matthew 5:44–48**; 7:12; 1 Peter 1:14–16) and we are not given a free pass to ignore that standard of God’s expectations for our behavior. We are accountable to God for how we live in this life (1 Peter 1:17). Apostle Peter said God has given us all things we need to live a life of godliness through knowing Christ (2 Peter 1:3). He has done everything needed for our salvation and sanctification (the process of becoming holy, set apart *to* God and *from* the world) by his divine power. By Jesus’ death and resurrection, and through faith in him, we died to sin and have been raised to new life in Jesus Christ (**Ephesians 2:1–10**). Very practically, what does that mean?

By the power of God through his Holy Spirit given to us when we believed (**Ephesians 1:13–14**; **Romans 8:1–14**), we can *be* and *live out* the righteousness of Christ, which God put in us when we put our faith in him to save and forgive us. “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30 NIV).

Paul told the Corinthian believers who were not getting along, “We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin in our

behalf, *so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*" (1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-21, emphasis added).

Once we lived the way the rest of unbelievers in the world live (**1 Peter 4:3; Galatians 5:19–21**), but having come to Christ, we now are God's workmanship created to do good, working out what God put in us (Ephesians 2:10; **Philippians 2:12–13**).

So, let's be the people of God he calls us to be.

Questions for Study

1. What is the Kingdom of God and what is one of its main characteristics as discussed in this lesson? Explain what that characteristic means.
2. Describe how the Kingdom of God is both a spiritual and physical kingdom.
3. Jesus said the Kingdom of God is near. How can we tell where it is? In what way does the Kingdom of God affect my life?
4. What other "kingdoms" are spoken of in Scripture besides the Kingdom of God?

*We are in a terrible and awful war. Our
only weapon is love and our only strategy is
servanthood.*

---J.R. Wallace

Prayer Time: Focus on God and His Kingdom Priorities

Humble your heart before the Lord, King of the Kingdom of God. Remember, our focus is on God, our Father in heaven. Take a moment to focus on him, entering his presence in worship and praise for who he is.

Confess known sin and ask God to reveal unknown sins so you can confess and repent of them.

Pray for yourself, “that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:9 – 10).

Pray for God’s kingdom to come, for the rule and reign of God to extend to more and more people. Ask him to show you how you should be part of advancing his Kingdom.

Pray for God’s will to be done, especially in and through the church, his Kingdom people, that we will all “be about [our] Father’s business,” living out his righteousness and carrying the good news of Jesus Christ from our doorstep to the far corners of the world (Matthew 28:18 – 20; Acts 1:8).

Lesson 5

Focus on God and His Kingdom Priorities in Prayer

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10)

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” ... “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37, 39)

Praying Your Kingdom come, Your will be done

Having established in Lesson 4 *what* the Kingdom of God is, and having also pointed out what the Scriptures teach in relation to our behavior as Kingdom people, we come to the question of *what does the kingdom of God mean for us in prayer?* So, in light of the topic of this Bible study, which is to learn to pray as Jesus taught us in the Lord’s Prayer, what does it mean for us to pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”?

It means we seek to *do* and *pray for* what God wants done. This is Kingdom praying. We align ourselves with God and his purposes. Our heart’s desire and goal in life is to live in obedience to what God has taught us in his Word, so that we can do his will and see his Kingdom come.

Under Orders

The exciting part is that in this endeavor to do God’s will, we discover we are not alone in the battle for God’s kingdom and doing his will on earth. Joshua made this discovery when he was about to lead the Israelites into Canaan after the death of his mentor, Moses.

When Joshua was near the town of Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with sword in hand. Joshua went up to him and demanded, “Are you friend or foe?”

“Neither one,” he replied. “I am the commander of the Lord’s army.”

At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground in reverence. “I am at your command,” Joshua said. “What do you want your servant to do?”

The commander of the Lord’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did as he was told. (Joshua 5:13–15 NLT)

Seek the will of God in prayer

Joshua was being obedient to his marching orders to lead Israel into Canaan. But he found out *he* was not the commander of the army; he was under the command of God who would himself lead his army.

As kingdom people, we realize we are not on our own but under the command of King Jesus, the Commander of the Lord’s army. As such, our responses to him should be exactly what Joshua’s were, worshiping him and declaring: “I am at your command. What do you want your servant to do?” and “[I will do] as [I am] told.”

When we pray to our Father in heaven, we do not demand our own way but lay down our will, subjecting it to the will of the All-wise God saying, “What do you want your servant to do?” This is how we align ourselves with his will. “Not my will but Your will be done” is a heart decision, a mindset and commitment, not just words tacked onto our prayers. He is our King; we do what he says just like Joshua did.

Taking the Kingdom, Fighting the Good Fight

Enemy-occupied territory – that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.

(C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

God's kingdom people are a thorn in the side and a fist in the eye of Satan as he seeks to displace God as ruler of the universe. Satan is "[y]our adversary, the devil, [who] prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Though we are told to beware of his deceitfulness and lies, we are also told not to fear him or those who follow him. We fear only One, the King of the Kingdom of God (**Matthew 10:28**).

We are commanded to, ⁹ "Resist [the devil], firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. ¹⁰ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. ¹¹ To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 5:9–11).

In this life we are to engage in the battle against the spirit enemies of God, but not in our own strength; we battle with the power and equipment of God. Paul wrote about God's spiritual warfare gear using the military vernacular of his day. Note carefully what this gear consists of and how we wear it:

Last of all I want to remind you that your strength must come from the Lord's mighty power within you. ¹¹ Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand safe against all strategies and tricks of Satan. ¹² For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against persons without bodies – the evil rulers of the unseen world, those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world; and against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world.

¹³ So use every piece of God's armor to resist the enemy whenever he attacks, and when it is all over, you will still be standing up.

¹⁴ But to do this, you will need the strong belt of **truth** and the breastplate of God's approval [**righteousness**]. ¹⁵ Wear shoes that are able to speed you on as you **preach the Good News of peace with God**. ¹⁶ In every battle you will

need **faith** as your shield to stop the fiery arrows aimed at you by Satan. ¹⁷ And you will need the helmet of **salvation** and **the sword of the Spirit – which is the Word of God**.

¹⁸ *Pray all the time.* Ask God for anything in line with the Holy Spirit's wishes. Plead with him, reminding him of your needs, and keep praying earnestly for all Christians everywhere (Ephesians 6:10-18 TLB, emphasis added).

Our kingdom prayers today and every day, joined with the prayers of all saints of all time, are weapons in God's war against evil (Revelation 8:3–5). Our prayers precede us to heaven and into the Presence of God, bringing both the will of God and the Kingdom of God to earth.

Questions for Study

Using the bulleted list of groups of people and Scriptures found on the following page, answer questions 1 and 2 below.

1. Personal: How would praying for God's Kingdom to come affect the way you pray for family members and friends, beyond the obvious prayers for their salvation? What other things must you identify in yourself and them that if changed would be evidence of God's Kingdom taking root in your lives? (Review the bulleted groups of people and Scriptures below.)
2. Societal: How would praying for God's Kingdom to come and his will to be done be expressed when you pray for societal issues such as political, economic, educational, and neighborhood spheres? Give examples. (Again, review the bulleted list and Scriptures below.)

God's Kingdom values are to shape our behavior toward and prayers for the following groups of people. Look up the Scriptures (looking up all verses is preferred, the minimum verses are in bold) and answer the Questions for Study above.

- **Family:** husband, wife, children, extended family
(Ephesians 5:22, 25; 6:1-4; **1 Peter 3:1-6, 7; 1 Timothy 5:3, 8**),
- **Money and how we use it:**
(**Matthew 6:19 – 21, 24 – 33**; Luke 12:15 – 34; 16:1-13; **1 Timothy 6:17 – 19**),
- **How we do our work and relate to:** bosses, co-workers, employees
(**Colossians 3:22 – 24; 4:1; 1 Peter 2:18 – 19**),
- **Our neighbors:** next door; in our community/country; those from other cultures among us and across the world; the orphan, widow, poor, and alien among us
(**Romans 13:8, 10; Ephesians 4:25, 32**; Titus 2:11 – 14; Matthew 7:1 – 12; **Matthew 28:18 – 20**; Psalm 146:5 – 9; **James 1:27; 2:14-26**; Micah 6:8)
- **Other Christians:**
(Psalm 133; Proverbs 6:16 – 19; Romans 14:1; **Colossians 3:1 – 17; Hebrews 10:23 – 25; 1 Peter 2:17; 5:5 – 7**),
- **Our enemies** and those who persecute us:
(**Matthew 5:11-12; 44 – 48; 1 Peter 3:13 – 16; 4:12 – 19**),
- **Those with authority to govern** us:
(**Romans 13:1ff; 1 Timothy 2:1 – 4; 1 Peter 2:13 – 17**).

Let us be faithful to live out God's righteousness, praying with God's power to do God's will.

*Praying like Jesus is telling the
Father what you long for while
desiring his will above all else.*

J.I. Packer

Prayer Time: Focus on God and His Kingdom Priorities

Open your prayer time with worship from Psalm 103:1 – 5.

My soul, praise Yahweh,
and all that is within me, praise His holy name.

2 My soul, praise the Lord,
and do not forget all His benefits.

3 He forgives all your sin;
He heals all your diseases.

4 He redeems your life from the Pit;
He crowns you with faithful love and compassion.

5 He satisfies you with goodness;
your youth is renewed like the eagle. (HCSB)

Using what this psalm says, thank and praise God for who he is and what he does.

Pray for the *salvation and spiritual growth* of family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers; for their growth as believers and deeper commitment to God. (**Colossians 1:9-12; 2 Peter 1:3–11**)

Pray for the Word of God and his gospel to spread unhindered around the world.

Pray for yourself and missionaries to be wise and bold to share the gospel; **pray for** more laborers to go to other cultures to tell the gospel and disciple people; pray for every effort being made to evangelize and disciple people into the Kingdom of God.

Pray for believers persecuted for their faith in Christ: May God deliver them from evil and give them grace for suffering for his name; may they love and pray for their enemies, and may they know the presence and comfort of God in the midst of suffering; and in all things, rejoice.

Lesson 6

Focus on God our Provider

“Give us this day our daily bread.” (Matthew 6:11)

God, who knows our needs before we ask, knows we need food, drink, clothing, and other material goods to sustain our lives. Perhaps that is one reason this petition for physical sustenance (give us this day our daily bread) is the first petition immediately following praying for God’s Kingdom to come and his will to be done, which we considered in the previous lesson. When God’s priorities become our priorities in life, we can trust God to fulfill his promise to make our needs his concern. Listen to what Jesus said: “No one can serve two masters; ... You cannot serve God and wealth. ²⁵ For this reason I say to you, *do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. ...Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*” (Matthew 6:24 – 25, emphasis added).

Jesus then gives proof from nature – birds and flowers – of how God cares for their needs and continues, “You of little faith! ³¹ Do not worry then, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear for clothing?” ³² For the Gentiles [unbelievers] eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” (Matthew 6:30 – 32, emphasis added).

First Things First

Reiterating what he had just taught his disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done,” Jesus said, “*seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33, emphasis added). First in priority in our hearts is the eternal kingdom, then our temporal material needs.

To further reassure his followers that they would not suffer loss if they put God first in their lives, rather than themselves and their needs, Jesus adds, “Do not be afraid,

little flock, because your Father has chosen to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves money belts that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near nor does a moth destroy. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Luke 12:32–34).

Since God vows to supply our physical needs, we should not make the primary goal of our lives to seek after meeting those needs. Rather, *we seek God’s kingdom and live out his righteousness (Philippians 2:12–13)*, setting our heart’s and minds on what is above and eternal (Colossians 3:1-2), using our wealth to build our treasure in heaven, not on earth. Then, instead of worry, we *trust God to provide*, even while we work diligently, faithfully, and honorably at our jobs (which he also provides).

Work Hard and Trust God

Paul, in writing to the Thessalonian believers, commended them for their enlarged faith in God in the midst of trials, their growing love for one another, and their obedience to put into practice the things of God they were taught (2 Thessalonians 1:3–4; 3:4). But he also drew their attention to a problem among them that was the opposite of worrying about their material needs; it was presuming on God’s goodness.

⁶ “Now here is a command, dear brothers, given in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ by his authority: Stay away from any Christian who spends his days in laziness and does not follow the ideal of hard work we set up for you. ⁷ *For you well know that you ought to follow our example: you never saw us loafing;* ⁸ *we never accepted food from anyone without buying it; we worked hard day and night for the money we needed to live on, in order that we would not be a burden to any of you.* ⁹ It wasn’t that we didn’t have the right to ask you to feed us, but *we wanted to show you firsthand how you should work for your living.* ¹⁰ Even while we were still there with you, we gave you this rule: ‘He who does not work shall not eat.’

¹¹ Yet we hear that some of you are *living in laziness, refusing to work, and wasting your time in gossiping.* ¹² In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we appeal to such people –

we command them — *to quiet down, get to work, and earn their own living*.¹³ And to the rest of you I say, dear brothers, never be tired of doing right” (2 Thessalonians 3:4–13 TLB, emphasis added).

Paul and his missionary team had modeled working hard to supply for their own needs, and called the new believers to follow their example. Hard work is not in conflict with the teaching of Jesus we find in Matthew 6. Thinking we are our own providers is wrong, as is the pendulum swing of being lazy and not working to provide for ourselves and families. To those who were lazy and undisciplined among the Thessalonian believers, Paul made it clear this was not the way of the Lord.

In fact, Paul said, in his instructions to Timothy about caring for widows, “If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). God calls us to disciplined and responsible living, working for our own keep yet trusting God to meet our needs. Ultimately, God is our Provider.

Questions for Study

1. Since God is our Provider, all the resources we have were given to us by God to steward/manage according to his will. As a manager of God’s resources, explain how you can use these resources to advance the Kingdom of God and build a treasure in heaven.

*I'd rather have a treasure to go to, than
a treasure I have to leave behind.*

Jacqueline Wallace

Prayer Time: Focus on God our Provider

Thank God for his good care of you all your life, for providing food, clothing, shelter, and all your other material needs.

Ask him to provide again for your present needs (and those of your family, friends, etc.), including health, job, financial, and other needs that affect your everyday life (name them).

Trust him as you choose to make God's Kingdom and living out his righteousness your top priority, using the wealth God has entrusted to you to serve others, investing in a treasure in heaven. He has promised to provide all your physical and material needs so you don't have to live for those things nor worry about them!

Thank him.

Lesson 7

Focus on God the Merciful and Just Judge

“Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

“For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

(Matthew 6:12, 14-15)

Forgiveness is a touchy topic to deal with. We’ve all been hurt or had wrong done to us by others at one time or another and to one degree or another, anything from small slights to major transgressions. It may seem easier to go through life holding a grudge, trying to ignore the one who hurt us rather than forgive the transgressor, but we will not like the end result of our unforgiveness. Jesus said the person who does not show mercy to another will herself not be shown mercy. We need to do some hard thinking about the cost to ourselves of unforgiveness.

The merciful man does himself good, but the cruel [merciless] man does himself harm. (Proverbs 11:17, bracket added)

Our relationships with God and others are extremely important to him. God has done everything to make reconciliation with him possible. He sent Jesus into the world to bear our sin and its penalty of death, *even when we were his enemies*. “For if *while we were enemies* we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son ...” (Romans 5:10, emphasis added). God had mercy on us and forgave our sins in Jesus Christ, as Paul declares,

But God, *being rich in mercy*, ... ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions (Ephesians 2:4–5)

At this point, some will ask, “But I’ve put my trust in Jesus to forgive my sins and save me from going to hell. Now you tell me I’ll be judged for my unforgiveness if I don’t forgive someone who has sinned against me? How can that be?”

Without getting into theological arguments, we'll simply go to what God has clearly stated in his Word. First, read Romans 8:1 – 2 quoted below (I recommend reading chapters 7 and 8 for the context in which we find verses 8:1 – 2):

“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”

When one is truly born again from above, indwelt by the Spirit of God, and living in obedience to the teachings of God, being led by his Spirit, we can claim the promise of God that we are forgiven and have eternal life and will not be condemned with those who reject Christ (**John 3:16, 18; Romans 8:1, 12 – 14, 17**). This is the great answer to Paul's cry in Romans 7:24 – 25,

“Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? ²⁵
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (emphasis added)

This is where we say, Hallelujah! This is the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to save! Praise God! We have been the recipients of the abounding mercy and grace of God, forgiving us and putting us into the family of God (**Romans 1:16**).

And from that moment, there have been expectations of us as well ...

Since it is God's will and expectation that his children be like him (**1 Peter 1:14 – 16**), becoming like his son Jesus (**Romans 8:29**), *we are to do to others as God has done to us by showing mercy to them*, both to brothers and sisters in Christ and those who do not know Christ, even those who are hostile to Christ. Listen carefully to what Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” ⁴⁴ But I say to you, *love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,*⁴⁵ *that you may be sons of your Father in heaven;* for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ...⁴⁸ Therefore you

shall be perfect⁷, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43 – 45, 48 NKJV, emphasis added)

Be like our Father in heaven, who is merciful to all, even his enemies.

How is it possible for us to love, bless, do good to, and pray for those who treat or treated us wrongly, as Jesus taught us to do, and yet refuse to forgive them? It's not.

- You undoubtedly know these words of the prophet Micah clearly stating what God expects of us, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and *to love mercy* and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8 NIV, emphasis added).

Love mercy. It's not a concept; it is flesh and blood real.

Walk humbly with God. This means there is no room for rebellion against what God has said. Rather, we submit to his word and way. He is teaching us his way through these words we are reading.

One day we will all stand before God and give an account of how we lived in this life. Believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 4:17 – 18**). This is where we give an account of how we treated others. Were we merciful toward others, especially those who sinned against us?

At the judgment seat of Christ, we are not dealing with eternal salvation versus eternal condemnation. The issue of eternal salvation/eternal life in Jesus Christ, according to God's word, was determined when you put your faith in Jesus Christ to be your King and Savior, repenting of your sin and walking in the truth of God's word.

The issue at hand now is this: though you love Jesus to be your savior, are you living under his Sovereign Kingship? He has the final say, the right to judge our behavior

⁷ "Perfect" / Greek "telios," "*perfect* in some point of character, *without shortcoming* in respect of a certain standard." Wm. D. Mounce, *Interlinear for the Rest of Us*.

in this life. And he has clearly said many times in his word, forgive as you have been forgiven, be merciful and you will receive mercy.

James, echoing Jesus' words — "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Matthew 5:7) — tells us we should be merciful in our judgment of others, "for judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13).

What a frightening thought, that we would be treated without mercy when we stand before the Lord, our Just and Merciful Judge, to give an accounting of how we lived our lives.

Paul says that what quality material we used and how we built/lived our lives on the foundation of Christ, will be tested by fire. What is of value will stand the test and will garner praise, but what is unworthy will be destroyed. Yet the person whose foundation is Christ, though her works failed to stand the test and she suffers loss, will still be saved, "yet though as by fire," like a person whose house burns down around her, and she barely escapes (**1 Corinthians 3:10–15**).

God is Just in his judgment and Righteous in all he does. We have a choice plainly laid before us: We can do things our own way or choose to live God's way!

God, who is "rich in mercy," loves to be merciful and through his bond-servant Paul instructs us to be like him:

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, *put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;*¹³ *bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.* (Colossians 3:12–13 NKJV, emphasis added)

There is no wiggle-room, as seen in the verses above, to get out from forgiving those who sin against us. The example has been set: God the Father and Christ himself,

at great cost, have forgiven us even when we were God's enemies. Shall we, who are forgiven, refuse to forgive another person?

Questions for study

1. Read Romans 5:8, 10 and Ephesians 2:4–6 and answer this question: How has God treated me?
2. Read Matthew 5:7; 7:1–2; 18:21–35; Luke 6:36, 37; 7:36–50; Colossians 3:13; James 2:12–13 and answer this question: What do these Scriptures teach us about why must we show mercy to others by forgiving them?

*“Blessed are the merciful, for
they shall receive mercy.”*

- Jesus (Matthew 5:7)

Prayer Time: Focus on God the Merciful and Just Judge

Thank God for the mercy he has shown you by forgiving your sins! Recount the many ways God has been merciful to you. Do not rush this part.

Recognize his costly forgiveness and search your heart for any grudges and unforgiveness toward others, any prideful attitude that says your sins are not as great as another's. Read **Matthew 7:1 – 5; 18: 21 – 35 and Luke 7:36 – 50**.

Confess any sin of holding a grudge and not forgiving another. These things are sin and will build a wall that separates you from God and keeps him from hearing your prayers (Isaiah 59:2) until you confess and repent of that sin of mercilessness and unforgiveness (Proverbs 28:13). What a frightening thought! There is **no thing worth broken fellowship** with God, no thing worth hanging onto that keeps your prayers from being heard. And perhaps even worse than that (if it can be fathomed that there is something worse than God not hearing our prayers), is that when you do not treat others the way God has treated you, God will treat you the way you treat them (**Matthew 6:14 – 15; 7:1-2, 12**).

Prayerfully read these Scriptures:

Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. (Proverbs 28:13 ESV)

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8 – 9 NIV)

Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; *just as the Lord forgave you, so must you do also*. (Colossians 3:13, emphasis added)

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy. (Matthew 5:7 NIV)

Continue to next page.

Jesus also said, “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

So speak and so act as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment will be merciless to the one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:12–13).

Be merciful. Forgive.

Lesson 8

Focus on God our Protector and Deliverer

“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Matthew 6:13)

"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one." (John 17:15)

In the original Greek language, the word used here in the Lord's prayer for temptation is used two different ways in Scripture, and context clarifies how it is being used. It can be used for *temptation to sin*, or it can mean *trials and suffering*. As we consider God as our Protector from temptation and Deliverer from evil there are two things we need to keep in mind:

- A. God never tempts us to do evil.
- B. God will allow our faith to be tested by trials and suffering.

These are two very different matters, temptation (to sin) and testing (of our faith), and it is vitally important that we understand them so that we will be prepared when they come, for they both will come to us all. Let's take a closer look at both types of temptation.

- A. God never tempts us to do evil.

The root of temptation is within – our own evil desires

James says, “When tempted [to do evil], no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, *nor does he tempt anyone*; ¹⁴ but *each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed*” (James 1:13–14 NIV, emphasis added). We cannot blame God for our temptations to sin. And though the devil is the Tempter, even he cannot *make us* do evil. We cannot get away with making the devil our scapegoat by saying, “The devil made me do it”! For that, we must look within ourselves, to the “evil desires” in our own sinful nature. No one can force us to sin; we ourselves make the choice.

Temptation is not irresistible

⁶Now these things took place as examples for us, *that we might not desire evil* as they did. ... ⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did....⁹ We must not put Christ to the test. ...¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did ... ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he *will not let you* be tempted beyond your ability, but *with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape*, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:6–13 ESV, emphasis added).

Note this does not say, “God will not give you more than you can handle.” It does say your temptations are not out of the ordinary and it affirms that God will make available an escape route, an exit door, from temptation to sin.

How do you recognize and make use of “the way of escape,” the exit door from temptation to evil that Paul says will be available? There are many ways of escape throughout Scripture. Let’s look at four of them.

Recognizing the Escape Routes

1. The dead don’t sin! (Romans 6:1–5, 6–7, 8–11, 12–13)

The first “way of escape” from temptation to sin comes with the salvation package. The whole sixth chapter of the book of Romans deals with the believer’s relation to sin (it is instructive to read the chapter). In a nutshell, how can we continue to live in sin when we have died to it? When we put our faith in Christ to be our Savior, we died with him, were buried with him, and we have been raised with Christ to live in newness of life, a fact visually portrayed in the act of believer’s baptism.

Paul explains “⁶ that our old self was crucified with him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; ⁷ for he who has died is freed from sin. ... ¹⁰ For the death that He [Christ] died, He died to sin once for all; *but the life that He lives, He lives to God.*”

And here's the key to the escape hatch, "*Even so [in the same way] consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 6:11). In other words, in the same way Christ died to sin (our sin, on our behalf) and lives for God since he was raised from the dead, we too count ourselves dead to sin and alive to God. It is a reality, but for us in practice, it is a *choice and a mindset* as clearly stated in these verses: "Therefore **do not let sin reign in your mortal body** so that you obey its lusts,¹³ and **do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin** as instruments of unrighteousness; but **present yourselves to God** as those alive from the dead, and *your members as instruments of righteousness to God* (Romans 6:12–13)." We must be active in the choice not to yield to temptation and just as active in the choice to pursue what is good and right.

Here, then, is our first "way of escape." It is our free will choice to 1) remind ourselves we are dead to sin and alive to God, and therefore to 2) take control of our body to do what is right (righteousness) rather than do what is wrong (sin).

2. Run baby run! (2 Timothy 2:22; Romans 6:11–13)

Another exit strategy to add to our arsenal against temptation to sin, is found in 2 Timothy 2:22. "Now *flee from* youthful lusts and *pursue* righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." In other words, "Run!" when temptation comes knocking. Run *from* temptation to sin and run *to* righteousness, faith, love and peace, and the fellowship of other believers. Does this sound familiar? See Romans 6:11–13 above. Adhere to the Law of Replacement: Replace the temptation with something good and right!

Make no mistake, one doesn't have to be "youthful" for lusts to assail! No matter one's age, the strategy to avoid walking into sin is to run away from it *toward* what is good and right.

3. En garde: Rightly use the Holy Spirit's sword, the word of God.

A third way of escape for us to use is powerfully represented to us by Jesus in his temptation in the wilderness. Satan himself tempted Jesus to sin, even using Scripture

against him. How did Jesus refute Satan's deceptive words? Jesus quoted Scripture. But unlike Satan who misquoted Scripture, twisting it in an attempt to make it say what it did not say, Jesus, knowing the correct meaning of the Bible verses, used God's word correctly, hitting his mark with the point of the sword of the Spirit. Should we do less than the Son of God? It behooves us to be good students of the Scriptures and learn how to effectively wield the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17), parrying the deceptive blows of the evil one.

4. On guard: Keep your eyes peeled and Pray!

Finally, and though there may be more examples of escape routes to temptation (look for them as you read Scripture), we will end with this one. At an extremely dire time in Jesus' life, he told three of his closest companions to "keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

We know all too well the truth of Jesus' last phrase, "the flesh is weak." We may be mightily willing in spirit, but we often stumble at mastering our old, selfish, lazy flesh as Romans 6 talks about. All the more reason for us to be alert and on guard at all times, continuing to watch and pray so that we don't enter into temptation.

Comfort and Resources in the Fight

We do have this comfort and motivation from God to remain faithful, choosing what is right and rejecting what is evil: since Jesus himself "was tempted in that which he has suffered, *he is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted*. . . .¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Therefore *let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*" (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15–16, emphasis added). Mercy and grace to stand against temptation and sin are available in abundance through prayer, at the throne of our heavenly Father. Help is waiting. Pray.

Now let's look at the word temptation when it is used of testing, trials and suffering.

B. God will allow our faith to be tested by trials and suffering.

Testing can strengthen us

Though God will never tempt us to do evil, he will allow testing and trials, with specific limitations, and these can serve to refine our faith (Job 1:6–12; 23:10; **1 Peter 1:3–9; Hebrews 12:1–17**).

Jesus told his disciples, “I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. *Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows.* But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 16:33 NLT, emphasis added). James continued Jesus’ thoughts when he wrote to believers about the positive results we could experience from trials: “*the testing of your faith produces endurance.*”⁴ And let endurance have its perfect result, *so that you may be perfect⁸ and complete, lacking in nothing*” (James 1:3–4, emphasis added). As a result of the positive outcomes, James tells us to consider it all joy when these trials come (James 1:2).

Echoing Jesus’ words when he prayed, “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name ... protect them from the evil one” (John 17:11, 15 NIV), Peter encourages by reminding us that, “you are guarded by the power of God operating through your faith, till you enter fully into the salvation which is all ready for the denouement of the last day [completion of God’s triumph over sin in the world]” (1 Peter 1:5, J.B. Phillips NT, bracketed note added). God is guarding us as we trust him day by day.

When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, God justified us in Christ and forgave our sins and we gained peace with God, so now we rejoice in our future hope of the glory of God. And even though we will, as Jesus warned, have many struggles in this world, because it is no friend of God or his people, Paul could boldly announce, “*we also exult [rejoice] in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance [endurance];*”⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;⁵ and hope does not

⁸ See footnote “perfect”/“telios,” page 50.

disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (**Romans 5:1–5**, emphasis and bracketed note added).

Do you rejoice in tribulations? This is a whole different way of looking at tough times, isn’t it? How can we please God in trials? Peter wrote, “¹⁹ For it brings favor if, mindful of God’s will, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is there if you sin and are punished, and you endure it? *But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God.* ²¹ For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in His steps” (1 Peter 2:19–21 HCSB).

The Word of God is clear, trials and testing of our faith can stimulate our movement toward maturity in our faith in God. Reread the verses above in Romans 5:1-5. There’s only one way to get perseverance (endurance), by persevering through difficulties; one way to get proven character, by having your character put to the testing/proving; only one way to secure hope, by learning that God is true and faithful in the midst of trials! So, let’s embrace the tribulations when they come and rejoice in the God who is our Strength and Deliverer.

Trials and testing can purify us and make us holy

John says, “everyone who has this hope fixed on Him [Christ] purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3 bracketed note added). The writer of Hebrews states that God our Father “disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in his holiness.” And although any discipline in the moment is painful, if we submit to it and learn from it, it produces “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” in us and “the sanctification (holiness) without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:10–11, 14. **Read all of Hebrews 12**). The cost of suffering discipline is certainly not greater than the reward of being with the Lord eternally. In truth, the reward of God’s presence is much greater than any cost to us.

We may feel alone at times in our struggles, but the truth is, we are surrounded by a great company of all the faithful who have gone before us, from whom we can learn this

walk of faith. Read the encouragement and instruction given by the writer of the book of Hebrews:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, *let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance* the race marked out for us, ² *fixing our eyes on Jesus*, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2 NIV, emphasis added)

Outlined above in those two verses from Hebrews 12 are the steps of obedience and victory for every follower of Jesus Christ. First, we cast off every sin and temptation; and second, we run the race before us with endurance, never giving in, never giving up. Finally, we keep our eyes on Jesus all the while; he set the example, marking out the path for us to follow.

Of these trials and testing, Peter says, “These trials are only to test your faith, to see whether or not it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests gold and purifies it – and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold; so if your faith remains strong after being tried in the test tube of fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day of his return” (1 Peter 1:7 TLB).

Trials can produce good in and for us – perseverance (endurance), character, spiritual maturity, holiness, hope, and praise from God. Even though the trials are painful to go through, the rewards are exponentially greater in comparison, “for momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Corinthians 4:17). Go for the faith that will bring our Lord’s “well done” when he returns!

Questions for study

1. Reflect on areas where you are tempted to sin. How can you apply any of the four ways of escape to those areas? Please elaborate.
2. Had you previously considered that God allows trials as a means to personal spiritual development? Explain your thoughts.
3. How does understanding that God allows us to be tested to reveal the quality of our faith so that God may be pleased with us and glorified through us, transform the way you view “trials”?
4. What steps will you take to align your thinking and behavior to rejoice in God’s gracious and merciful salvation and stand strong in trials? (Refer to **James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:13 – 19; 2:1 – 3**).



Photo by Daily Verses

Prayer Time: Focus on God our Protector and Deliverer

Thank God for his protection from evil (and the evil one) and for making a way out of every temptation to sin/evil.

Pray that you do not enter into temptation by failure to live in obedience to the Lord (Mark 14:38).

Pray God leads you “in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake,” steering you away from destructive paths (**Psalm 23:3**) and that he will grant you the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that you will live worthy of the Lord, pleasing him in all things, being fruitful in good works and increasing in your knowledge of God (Colossians 1:9–10).

Thank God for being present with you, holding your hand when you suffer trials and testing of your faith (**Psalm 37:23–24**; Hebrews 13:5–6).

Ask God to remind you to put his Word into practice, thereby cooperating with him in making you holy through his truth (**John 17:17**; **1 Peter 1:22**).

Pray for grace for yourself and other believers to work hard to be the answer to Jesus’ prayer that all God’s people would become one (**John 17:13–21**).

Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name... protect them from the evil one. (John 17:11, 15 NIV)

How wonderful it is, how pleasant, when brothers live in harmony! (Psalm 133:1 TLB)

For You, Lord, bless the righteous one;

You surround him with favor like a shield. (Psalm 5:12 HCSB)



Dear Lord,

Today I thought of the words of Vincent van Gogh: "It is true there is an ebb and flow, but the sea remains the sea." You are the sea. Although I experience many ups and downs in my emotions and often feel great shifts and changes in my inner life, you remain the same. Your sameness is not the sameness of a rock, but the sameness of a faithful lover. Out of your love I came to life, by your love I am sustained, and to your love I am always called back. There are days of sadness and days of joy; there are feelings of guilt and feelings of gratitude; there are moments of failure and moments of success; but all of them are embraced by your unwavering love. . . . O Lord, sea of love and goodness, let me not fear too much the storms and winds of my daily life, and let me know there is ebb and flow but the sea remains the sea.

Amen.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Henri Nouwen". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Henri" and last name "Nouwen" clearly legible.

Quote from Henri Nouwen Society

Picture by Unsplash

Reprise: The Five Focus Points of The Lord's Pattern Prayer

1. **Focus on God our Father in heaven:** hallowed be Your name
2. **Focus on God and His Kingdom:** Your Kingdom come, Your will be done
3. **Focus on God our Provider:** Give us this day our daily bread
4. **Focus on God the Merciful and Just Judge:** Forgive us, as we forgive
5. **Focus on God our Protector and Deliverer:** Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

The Lord's Prayer answers the request put to Jesus, "Teach us to pray." May we say with the psalmist, "To You I lift up my eyes, O You who are enthroned in the heavens!" Our focus on God, we come to him as his children, expectantly, "as the eyes of a maid [look] to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until he is gracious to us (Psalm 123:1 – 2, bracket added). Let us focus on our Father in heaven, the Sovereign God, whose "is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen."

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ³⁴ For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? ³⁵ Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? ³⁶ For *from* Him and *through* Him and *to* Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." (Romans 11:33-36, emphasis added)

