

# THE MODEL PRAYER EXAMINED AND EXPOUNDED

—By James E. Gibbons—

*9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*

*10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

*11 Give us this day our daily bread.*

*12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

*13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

—Matthew 6:9-13, KJV

**THAT WHICH** is commonly called the “Lord’s Prayer” is found in Luke 11:1-4 and Matthew 6:9-13. (But it really would be better to call it the “Model Prayer,” or the “Disciples’ Prayer,” as the sinless Christ would not be praying such a prayer, asking forgiveness). The two references to this prayer in the Scriptures were spoken on two different occasions. In the account in Luke, the disciples of Christ were so impressed by the prayer life of Jesus that one of them besought the Lord, saying, “Lord, teach us to pray.” In Matthew’s account, the prayer is incorporated into the larger context of the Sermon on the Mount. Repetition certainly is a key in effectively getting teachings across, and the Lord used it.

Too many times today we have passed over the words of this prayer, treating them as well-known, but elementary platitudes, whereas they are anything but this. In all that is said and implied, their depth and scope are greater and more far reaching than we realize. As the giving of the Ten Commandments started with a pronouncement of the reality of God, then was broken down into two tables, the first having to do with God and the second, man (Exodus 20:1-17), the way that we are to approach God in prayer is accordingly presented (Matthew 6:9-13). After recognizing and personally addressing God, petition for the things of God comes first and the things of man come next, second (last). As in everything else, God comes first (Matthew 6:33), then man. Then the prayer is neatly summed up in its conclusion and doxology.

The Lord said, “After this manner therefore pray ye.” Although there may be nothing wrong in reciting this prayer as a group, we believe it is not meant that the form of the words be used ritualistically. Rather, the wording seems simply to be suggestive guidelines of how we should approach God, what our petitions should be about, and the priorities in

the order of presentation to God. In this study, in a concise manner, we will try to understand the original meaning as intended here, and a more extended and expanded meaning in the light of the rest of the New Testament Scriptures. Like the impressed and inquisitive disciple who approached Jesus, this writer comes humbly as an inadequate student and practitioner who would like to learn more about prayer.

An outline of the prayer, which seems quite simple, yet basic and inclusive, follows:

**GOD ADDRESSED: “*Our Father which art in heaven*”**

**1. GOD’S PART OF THE PRAYER:**

- (1) “*Hallowed be thy name*”
- (2) “*Thy kingdom come*”
- (3) “*Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*”

**2. MAN’S PART OF THE PRAYER:**

- (1) “*Give us this day our daily bread*”
- (2) “*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*”
- (3) “*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*”

**CONCLUDING DOXOLOGY AND AMEN: “*For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*”**

**GOD ADDRESSED:**

**“*Our Father Which Art in Heaven*”**

God is to be addressed as “*Our Father.*” This is most meaningful. This implies that we are His children and that He is accordingly approachable as our Father. And from the New Testament perspective, we are children of God through the new birth (John 3:1-5; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26, 27). “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6). God is a personal God and very approachable, and prayer is uniquely a privilege of a Christian.

This prayer cannot be prayed selfishly. Notice we are to pray “*Our Father.*” We cannot approach God, and pray this prayer, without acknowledging and including others. This truth is to be kept before us throughout all of the prayer in the different parts of the petitions.

The One to whom we pray is not bound by earthly limitations and imperfections. This is implied when we address Him as “*our Father which art in heaven.*” He is above all and knows all in reference to His earthly creatures.

**GOD’S PART OF THE PRAYER:**

Genesis 1:1 reads, “In the beginning God...” He is before all things, and the cause of all things. He is the “Father of spirits” (Hebrews 12:9).

“In Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). He is the great “I AM” (Exodus 3:14), the “high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity” (Isaiah 57:15)—“from everlasting to everlasting,” He is God (Psalms 90:2). Anyway that you choose to look at it, it is always fitting and proper that God and the things of God be considered and dealt with first. Although we are made in His likeness and image (Genesis 1:26), we are fallen creatures and must always come humbly to the “throne of grace.”

The three petitions that we see making up God’s part of the prayer seem to be almost parallel and overlapping in their meaning, as they unfold before us, and then they are descending in their application. We see God’s high and holy purpose in reference to Himself and man. His name is to be hallowed, His kingdom is to come, and His will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

### **“Hallowed Be Thy Name”**

The name of God is revealed in His character. His name is hallowed when his character is made known (by word of mouth, and especially as it is seen embodied in our lives). Subsequently, the Lord Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). As creatures of God, or His supposed people, by not displaying God’s attributes in our lives in the way we live, “the name of God is blasphemed” (Romans 2:21-24); we make His name become a curse word. And, we are sorry to say, the sad situation now is that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). We are a fallen race of people. So, uppermost, above all things, it is God’s desire that His name again be hallowed as it should be, and in His attributes being made known, He be glorified (which mankind has not been accomplishing). And thus, in Him being glorified, His over-all purpose for man will be accomplished.

### **“Thy Kingdom Come”**

The Old Testament had repeatedly foretold of a coming kingdom, unique and everlasting in nature (Psalms 89:3, 4; Isaiah 9:6, 7; 11:1-10; Daniel 2:44; etc.). With their appearance upon the scene, John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus preached that this kingdom was at hand (Matthew 3:1, 2; 4:17). Later this is defined as the church (Matthew 16:18, 19), a spiritual kingdom (Matthew 18:3; Colossians 1:13; 1 Peter 2:9). In anticipation of its coming, the disciples were instructed to pray, “Thy kingdom come.” Then it became a reality in its coming and inception on the day of Pentecost in the second chapter of Acts (in connection with this, notice Mark 9:1). But, in an extended and expanded sense, we can still pray this prayer today. We can pray, “Thy kingdom come” in

reference to evangelism, extending the boundaries of the kingdom. We also can pray, looking forward to the coming of its eternal phase in heaven, even as John the Revelator noted and prayed, “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

**“Thy Will Be Done in Earth,  
As It Is in Heaven”**

We said that these three petitions, making up God’s part of the prayer, seem almost to be parallel and overlapping. God’s name is to be hallowed as He is glorified. Man has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). But with the coming of the kingdom, and man’s spiritual restoration to God through Christ Jesus, man is in a better position to accomplish God’s glory again. Now parallel with this in meaning is His will being done on earth as it is in heaven. His will is accomplished in His attributes being made manifest in redeemed mankind, and thus His name being hallowed and glorified. And, consequently, including all three aspects of God’s part of the model prayer being realized, Paul writes from this panoramic view, “Unto him [God] be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:21).

Perhaps more needs to be said in particular about God’s will being done “in earth, as it is in heaven.” How is God’s will done in heaven? Perhaps we are to think in terms of angels rendering obedience, and man’s need of accordingly being in harmony with the heavenly Father. Perhaps we are to think in terms of God’s plan for errant mankind, which was in His mind from eternity, now being unfolded and taking place on earth. Many thoughts can and may be thought, and they all will point back to His glory being accomplished.

**MAN’S PART OF THE PRAYER:**

Having summarized the things of God as seen in the first part of the prayer, we now approach man’s part. Specifically in man’s part, the first two petitions are for daily bread and forgiveness. However, these two requests may be representative of all of man’s physical and spiritual needs (since man is body and spirit, 1 Corinthians 6:20). And expressive of this, Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Then as an outcropping of this, a third request enters the picture, “lead us not into temptation...” The temptations, or trials, come in connection with the categories of the first two petitions, involving the physical and the spiritual.

### **“Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread”**

The thought behind how God is to be addressed as “*our Father*” is brought before us again here. We are to pray, “Give *us* this day *our* daily bread.” Notice the emphasis on “us” and “our.” We cannot pray this prayer selfishly. We must always have an eye to, and be sensitive of, the needs of others as well as our own. To pray otherwise is unacceptable.

Explicit trust and reliance on God are implied here. Reference to “daily bread” calls to remembrance the manna supplied by God to the children of Israel on a daily basis in the wilderness. The beautiful and reassuring words spoken further by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount ring out again (Matthew 6:25-34). Then his summary statement gets our attention, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness: and *all these things shall be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33). “All these things” refer to the basics, food and clothing. The apostle Paul wrote, “And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content” (1 Timothy 6:8). As we daily trust God for sustaining sustenance, let us not forget our part of the equation (Genesis 3:19; 2 Thessalonians 3:10). Someone has said, “God gives every bird its food, but he doesn’t throw it into its nest.” However, God blesses in many ways (Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:17), even blessing unbelievers. Then from his personal experience, even in the Old Testament, David wrote, “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Psalms 37:25).

### **“And Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Forgive Our Debtors”**

Here, yet again, in this petition the collective “us,” “we,” and “our” are held before us. This readily reminds us that “*all* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). When “we” pray this part of the prayer in reference to debts and forgiveness, “we” cannot pray it without being reminded that “we” are all in the “same boat.” The need is universal. And that for which we pray, we must be willing to extend to others to receive ourselves. Then, from a more extended view, we cannot pray this prayer without having evangelistic feelings toward a world lost in sin.

Like in the first part of man’s part of the model prayer, praying for “daily bread,” the word “daily” lingers with us. The possibility of sin is still there. We cannot pray self-righteously like the Pharisee in the parable of the Pharisee and publican praying in the temple (Luke 18:9-14). With the publican, we must pray, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (18:13). The apostle John wrote, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8), but



reassuringly he continues, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:9). In repentance we confess our sins (Acts 8:22), not to go right back to sinning, but to get the victory as we cease and desist committing them.

Sin is an awful thing in the sight of a sinless God who says, “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). And the person who has been forgiven by God, and realizes the magnitude of what has taken place, will have no problem in forgiving others. In fact, this is actually tied in with his own forgiveness.

### **“And Lead Us Not into Temptation, But Deliver Us from Evil”**

The words “temptation” and “evil” stand out here. Each can have one of two meanings and applications in the Scriptures. The word commonly translated “temptation” in the New Testament means to prove, to try. (1) One may be tried through hardships and tribulations that come his way, or (2) the trials may take the form of outright temptations to sin. Likewise, the word “evil” can refer to (1) non-moral, bad situations (like the coming of old age with its physical infirmities being called “evil days,” Ecclesiastes 12:1-7). And, obviously, (2) “evil” basically refers to sin and that which is morally wrong. Looking back, in an expanded consideration of this, we can think of a direct tie-in of not being led into temptations (or trials) in connection with the physical and the spiritual (the petitions for bread and forgiveness of sin, being representative of these two categories of man’s being and needs). Trials and the overt temptation to sin confront us in these areas. We wish to be spared from this.

God allowed the devil to put Job to the test involving calamities that came his way, which could have been turned into temptation in the moral sense. His wife suggested that he curse God and die. But he passed both tests. He came out approved. After his baptism, the Lord Jesus was led of the Spirit into the wilderness where he was tempted of the devil to sin (Luke 4:1-13). We know that he did not succumb to sin. James writes, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (James 1:13). However, although God does not directly tempt us, He may allow temptation. But we have these reassuring words spoken by the apostle Paul, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Yes, Lord, you know our limitations. Lead us not into temptation, whether it be physical or spiritual, (that which we cannot handle), but give us grace whereby we may come through all of this victoriously. May deliverance be ours.

**“For Thine Is the Kingdom,  
and the Power, and the Glory. Amen”**

This doxology and concluding “amen” fittingly brings these guidelines for prayer to a close, the basic concerns of God and man having been dealt with. Everything begins and ends with God. The “amen” puts an affirmative exclamation and agreement on all that has been prayed. Yes, verily, verily; so be it. We should never pray anything that we cannot in confidence and full assurance say “amen” about.



*Follow-up Thoughts on*

**“THE MODEL PRAYER  
EXAMINED AND EXPOUNDED”**

**NOW**, in the light of the rest of the New Testament and as a follow-up to the first part of this study, we feel a few expanded and appended thoughts are in order. We can see the whole picture better. This will make our understanding more complete and we can more effectively pray as the Lord would have us pray.

**THE WILL OF GOD**

In the first part of the prayer that the Lord taught his disciples, he instructed them to pray, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” The apostle John further asserted in 1 John 5:14, “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, *if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.*” The will of God, and asking according to his will, are closely interwoven (if we expect to have our prayers answered). Therefore, it is important that we know what is meant when he says, “If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.”

What is the will of God? What is involved in asking “anything according to his will”? Basically, in that for which we pray, this falls under two categories: (1) The fixed will of God as made known in the Scriptures, and (2) God’s personal and permitted will in our lives. And, taking it a step further, the one who prays must be doing the will of God.

**(1) The Will of God as  
Revealed in the Word of God**

The will of God involves His purpose being accomplished in reference to His creation, and especially in reference to man made in His image and likeness. The purpose of God is His glory. And His glory is accomplished in man when His attributes are made evident in the godly lives that we live. This can be seen in such qualities as righteousness, holiness and love. But the problem is that we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). In the model prayer the disciples were instructed to pray, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” In the execution of God’s plan of salvation, Christ lived the will of God perfectly to become our Savior. The apostle Paul tells us the very center of God’s will is the salvation of mankind, “Who [God] *will* have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). In reference to all of this, he likewise says that God has “made known unto us the mystery of *his will*” (Ephesians 1:9; 3:1-5). The Word of God is that revelation of God’s will as to His purpose as to what is expected of us. Peter tells us that a Christian “no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the *will of God*” (1 Peter 4:2). So, the Bible, and now the New Testament, is God’s fixed and unchanging will for mankind. No prayer should be made that comes in conflict with the Word of God.

### **Not “According to His Will”**

To illustrate, selfishness stands in the way of answered prayer. Such a prayer cannot be prayed according to God’s will. James wrote, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3).

Let us make a more graphic illustration. In response to those who cried out on the Day of Pentecost, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” the apostle Peter replied, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Then we read, “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized...” (Acts 2:37-41). To accept the grace of God in forgiveness, and thus receive the Holy Spirit, men here were told to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. Peter emphatically says this promise was to them, to their children, to those that were afar off (Gentiles, Ephesians 2:11-13), and to as many as would ever become Christians. In other words, what Peter is saying is a fixed thing. This is what everyone is expected to do in accepting Christ. It stands until the “end of the world



[age]” (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16).

However, we have a problem today. Men would circumvent what Peter said in Acts 2:38. Sinners are told simply to pray and they will be saved. Certainly in reaching out to God a sinner is disposed to pray, and this is not discouraged, but God has a fixed way whereby we accept His grace according to Acts 2:37-41. To think that God would save us any other way is to ask Him to set aside what He has said in His Word. This is almost like an act of presumptuous audacity to think that by simply praying God will set aside His expressed will. (However, many are unaware of what the Bible really teaches). Saul of Tarsus fasted and prayed three days (Acts 9:9-11), and, yet Ananias had to come to him and say, “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). “If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us” (1 John 5:14) Yes, it is God’s will that we be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9), but God has let us know His will on how this takes place.

The Word of God is the revelation and embodiment of the fixed will of God. “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalms 119:89). And, with the coming of the New Testament, in the preaching of the message of Christ by the apostles, whatever was bound on earth was bound in heaven (Matthew 16:19; 28:18; John 12:48). God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; 2 Timothy 2:13). Therefore, if something is right or wrong, no amount of praying will change what God thinks about it—it *is not according to his will.*”

## (2) The Personal And Permitted Will of God

The second category in considering the will of God involves his personal and permitted will. God is personally involved in our lives. There is His permitted will. This is especially true of Christians. A good Scripture to bring out along this line is James 4:13-16. James writes of those who seem to be boasting about what they are going to do. He says, “Go to now [listen now], ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, *If the Lord will*, we shall live, and do this, or that.” Time and again Paul refers to the will of God in this way. Notice Acts 18:21; Romans 1:10; 15:32; and 1 Corinthians 4:19. When Paul was set on going on up to Jerusalem in the face of great danger, although his fellow Christians warned him against it, they said, “*The will of the Lord be done*” (Acts 21:14).

So, when we pray, always keep in mind that God knows all about us and what is best for us. He knows what He would like to be accomplished in our lives. He knows the best timetable in it being brought about. He knows our limitations. Many times He is providentially at work in our lives. And in view of all of this and if we are committed to His *revealed will*, we know that “if we ask any thing according to his will [including his *permitted will*], he heareth us.” And, consequently, Paul says, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). It has been said that if a person lives by plan he will die by plan.

### **Those Who Do the Will of God**

That being the case, that brings us to our last thought about the will of God. Our lives must be lived in the center of His will. This has to do with our relationship to Him and the way that we live. This is likewise a key to having our prayers answered. The blind man whose sight had been restored by Christ, and in answering the Jews, said, “Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and *doeth his will*, him he heareth” (John 9:31). Later Jesus said to his disciples, “*If ye abide* in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7). Paul wrote Timothy, “I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up *holy hands*, without wrath and doubting” (1 Timothy 2:8). James tells us that “the effectual fervent prayer of a *righteous man* availeth much” (James 5:16). And to sum up the over-all picture, remember that the Lord said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). We cannot expect God to hear our prayers if we are not living right.

### **“Thy Will Be Done”**

Therefore, when we pray to the heavenly Father, any way that we choose to look at it, the will of God is what should stand in the forefront. Jesus is our model as he agonized and prayed there three times in the garden of Gethsemane, “O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done” (Matthew 26:36-46). Let us always be of the same disposition.

### **ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ON PRAYING THE MODEL PRAYER**

#### **“God Be Merciful to Me a Sinner”**

Inasmuch as we are to pray “lifting up *holy hands*, without wrath and doubting” (1 Timothy 2:8), and “the prayer of a *righteous man* [not an

unrighteous or a self-righteous man] availeth much” (James 5:16), we need to be sure that our sin problem is dealt with when we approach God (and that we are indeed what these Scriptures teach). The parable of the Pharisee and the publican who went up into the temple to pray gets this point across in a good way. We know how the self-righteous Pharisee vainly complimented himself before God, but “the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, *God be merciful to me a sinner.*” Then Jesus said, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:6-14). Realizing that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), we must ever come before God like the publican. James strongly admonishes his readers, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:8-10). Yes, having done this, we are ready to come before the throne of grace in an acceptable way. Let us always have a repentant heart.

### **“With Thanksgiving Let Your Requests Be Made Known to God”**

With that being said, thanksgiving is next in order as we approach God in prayer. Paul admonished in Colossians 4:2, “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same *with thanksgiving.*” Likewise, in Philippians 4:6 he exhorts, “Be careful [full of care, anxious] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known unto God.” Too many times our prayers are heavy on asking, with little given to thanksgiving. We are blessed and never acknowledge it. How ungrateful can we get?! In writing to the Christians at Rome, Paul said, “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all...” (Romans 1:8). And, so, thanksgiving should be expressed in the early part of our prayers. Yes, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

### **“In the Name of Christ”**

And as “appendage” thought in the light of later teachings of Christ, we would end the model prayer by making clear that we are asking in the name of Christ. The Lord said this to his disciples as he was nearing the end of his earthly ministry, “Whatsoever ye shall *ask the Father in my name*, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:23, 24; also,

notice John 14:13 and 15:16). We are to be “giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:17). This should be true, whether we do it audibly or in our hearts (or in any other sense). It is shameful in this day when men would try to adapt Christianity to all religions that the name of Christ is omitted in their prayers. In fact, it is only in Christ being our great high priest in heaven that we can draw near to God with assurance (Hebrews 4:14-16). To leave Christ out is to cut off the vital line of connection to the heavenly Father.

There is much more that could be said, but these are some follow-up thoughts on praying the model prayer. Add these thoughts to what was written in the first part of this study, “The Model Prayer Examined and Expounded,” and it will more round out the picture. Let us follow these guidelines to praying as the Scriptures teach. Amen. □



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