

# A NECESSARY PRAYER

SERIES: BLESSED ARE



Catalog No. 20191124  
Matthew 6:5-15  
12th Message  
Scott Grant  
November 24, 2019

*Matthew 6:5-15*

My laptop seems to think it knows what I need.

Lately, my laptop seems to think I need help with my golf swing. As a matter of fact, now that my kids are a little older, I've been trying to get out on the course more often, but I'm not hitting them as consistently as I did before they were born. My laptop seems to know this about me.

My laptop also seems to think I need a new SUV. As a matter of fact, the minivan that we purchased when our second child was born is getting old, and repair bills are beginning to pile up, and I've thought that maybe the time has come to replace it with an SUV. My laptop seems to know this about me.

What do you need? Who knows what you need? Do you think you know what you need? What does Jesus have to say about what we need? We come, in our study of the Sermon on the Mount, to the Lord's Prayer.<sup>1 2</sup>

## Pray in secret

**Matthew 6:5-6:**

**"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."**

The hypocrites give to the needy for show (Matthew 6:1-4); they also pray for show. They give in order to be seen, ultimately so that those who see them may praise them. Likewise, the hypocrites pray in order to be "seen by others," evidently so that those who see them might praise them. By their public giving and their public praying, the hypocrites are seeking to burnish their reputations. Their "reward," both for giving and for praying, is what they sought: praise from others.

Jesus not only instructs us to give in secret; he also instructs to pray in secret, in a private place. He doesn't mean that we should always pray in secret. After all, he prayed publicly (Matthew 11:25-27, John 17). Jesus means that we shouldn't pray for show.

Going to a private place helps us pray to our Father without worrying about how others perceive us. In secret, you don't have to worry about whether you're eloquent or not, whether you're raising your hands or not, whether you're emotive or not, or whether you're standing, sitting, kneeling, walking, running, or dancing. In secret, you can be uninhibited.

Jesus does not say that the Father "hears" us praying, though of course, he hears us. Jesus says the Father "sees" us praying. Based on what he sees, the Father rewards us. If you don't know what to pray or how to pray, just pray, and your Father will reward you.

Jesus tells us where to pray. Before he tells us how to pray, he tells us how not to pray.

## Your Father knows what you need

**Matthew 6:7-8:**

**"And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."**

Gentiles use the same words over and over again and use many words in order to get the attention of their pagan gods. Jesus doesn't mean that we should never repeat ourselves in prayer. After all, he repeated himself, and in one of his stories, he extolled a woman who repeated herself (Matthew 26:44, Luke 18:1-8). Nor does Jesus mean that we should never use many words, for he prayed all night (Luke 6:12).

No, he means we shouldn't use "empty" words based on the assumption that God isn't listening to us or on the assumption that God is unwilling to respond to us.

Repetition isn't the problem. Length isn't the problem. Meaningless repetition and meaningless length are the problems.

In contrast to what the Gentiles believed about their gods, your Father "knows what you need before you ask him." Your Father not only sees you, but he also knows you so intimately that he knows what you need. He not only knows what you need, he also knows what you need before you pray, and before you even know what to pray for—which means he knows you better than you know yourself.

Most parents want the best for their children, but they don't always know what is best for them. Our heavenly Father, on the other hand, is all-knowing. Some parents may know what is best for their children but are disinclined to give it to them. Our heavenly Father, on the other hand, is all-good. Some parents may know what is best for their children and may be inclined to give it to them but don't have the power to give it to them. Our heavenly Father, on the other hand, is all-powerful. Our heavenly Father is all-knowing, all-good, and all-powerful.

Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that our heavenly Father gives "good things to those who ask him" (Matthew 7:11). Our Father knows what we need before we "ask him," and he gives what is good to those who "ask him."

Because your Father knows what you need before you ask him, you don't need to pray in order to get his attention so that you can convince him to give you what you want or what you think you need. That's what Jesus says, anyway.

When Jesus told us to not pray like the hypocrites, he told us what to do instead: pray privately, knowing that our Father will reward us. When he tells not to pray like the Gentiles while informing us that our Father knows what we need, is there something we're supposed to do instead? Yes, there is.

## The Lord's Prayer

**Matthew 6:9-15:**

**"Pray then like this:**

**"Our Father 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 lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.**

**"For if you forgive others their trespasses,  
your heavenly Father will also forgive  
you, but if you do not forgive others their  
trespasses, neither will your Father forgive  
your trespasses."**

This isn't the only way to pray, of course. After all, both Jesus and his apostles pray in many other ways. This is a model prayer that particularly contrasts with the meaningless, repetitious, long-winded prayers of the Gentiles and which is especially rooted in the awareness that our heavenly Father knows what we need before we ask him.

The word translated "then" would be better translated "therefore." Therefore, because your Father knows what you need before you ask him, pray "like this." What's the connection between the Father's knowledge of our need and Jesus' instruction to pray this way?

If you believe that your heavenly Father knows your need, wants to meet your need, and can meet your need, then you believe that he can be trusted. Probably most people, if they're thinking about their need, wouldn't think to pray this kind of prayer. In fact, if they're thinking about their need, they might hesitate to pray this kind of prayer.

## The meaning of the prayer

I wonder about this prayer.

When we ask for God's name to "hallowed," we're asking for him to be recognized and particularly that he be recognized as holy. When we ask for God's kingdom to come, we're asking for him to take over, right here on earth, where we live. When we ask for God's will to be done, we're sublimating our will to his will.

When we ask God for our daily bread, we're acknowledging our dependence on him for even our most basic needs. When we ask God to forgive our debts, that is, our sins, we're signing on to forgive our debtors, that is, those who have sinned against us. When we ask

God to lead us not into temptation but to instead deliver us from evil, we're asking that he would deny us certain pleasures that so many in our world assume are more or less essential in order to enjoy life.

I wonder if I care more about my name than his name, more about my kingdom than his kingdom, and more about my will than his will. I wonder if maybe I'm capable enough to get my own bread without having to ask him for it. I wonder if I really want his forgiveness, if it means that I'm not allowed to nurse a grudge. I wonder if maybe a little temptation might spice things up a little bit.

I wonder about this prayer.

## Jesus prays what he preaches

I think about Jesus in Gethsemane.

He prays, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." Then he prays a second time, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Then, Matthew tells us, Jesus "prayed for the third time, saying the same words again" (Matthew 26:36-46).

You can't say that Jesus doesn't pray what he preaches.

How does the Father answer Jesus when he prays the Lord's Prayer or at least one part of the Lord's Prayer? The cup doesn't pass from Jesus. Jesus drinks the cup. What was the will of the Father? As the prophet Isaiah says, "it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he put him to grief" (Isaiah 53:10).

Crush him he did, and put him to grief he did, until Jesus finally cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)

Crucified  
Laid behind a stone  
You lived to die  
Rejected and alone  
Like a rose  
Trampled on the ground

Jesus prays in Gethsemane, and the answer is a cross on Golgotha. As George Bailey might say, when he got socked in the face right after offering up a desperate prayer in the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, "That's what you get for praying."

## I need to pray

I wonder about this prayer. I think about Jesus in Gethsemane. Then I think about me.

Looking back, I can now say that I didn't know what I needed nearly as well as I thought I did. In fact, the evidence would suggest that I was mostly misguided: not only "a rebel without a cause" (James Dean) but also a "rebel without a clue" (Tom Petty).

For example, in days gone by, before I met Karen, my amazing wife, I met a few women whom I thought were particularly suited to meet what I thought to be my needs. It turned out that I was more or less exactly wrong—multiple times.

These days, I wake up to dozens of problems both near and far that I don't how to solve. Some of them I don't even know how to think about.

I don't know what I need. But I know that I need. Jesus tells me that my Father knows what I need before I ask him.

Okay. What do I need? I think I need to pray to my Father. I think I need to pray this prayer. I can't trust myself to know what I need, and even if I knew what I needed, I can't trust in my own ability to get it. I'm not all-knowing. I'm not all-good. I'm not all-powerful. So I pray:

Our Father 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 lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

## He will see and be satisfied

I pray this prayer. Then I think again about Jesus in Gethsemane, where he prayed "My Father, . . . not as I will, but as you will" and "My Father, . . . your will be done." Yes, Isaiah says, "it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he put him to grief."

But Isaiah also says, "Surely he has borne our *griefs*," "he was *crushed* for our iniquities," and "the *will* of the

Lord shall prosper in his hand.” Finally, Isaiah says, “Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied.”

What was Jesus doing as he hung on the cross? He was honoring the name of the Father, he was bringing in the kingdom, he was doing the will of the Father, he was giving us the bread of his broken body, he was forgiving our debts, he was delivering us from evil.

Because Jesus prayed this prayer and submitted to the will of the Father, the kingdom will come, finally and completely, and we will be delivered from evil, finally and completely. Jesus will see and be satisfied, finally and completely.

Crucified  
Laid behind the stone  
You lived to die  
Rejected and alone  
Like a rose trampled on the ground  
You took the fall  
And thought of me  
Above all

I think about Jesus in Gethsemane, and I think, “My goodness, my Father knows what I need before I ask him!” If my Father gave me what I needed almost two thousand years before I was born by giving me his Son, then maybe I can trust that he knows what I need, before I ask him, now and forevermore.

## My own Gethsemane

And if I should come to my own Gethsemane, whatever that place may be, I will pray as Jesus prayed: “My Father, not as I will, but as you will.” I will pray a second time: “My Father, your will be done.” I will even pray a third time, saying the same words again.

And if it should come to pass that the answer to my prayer in my own Gethsemane is something like a cross on Golgotha, whatever that place may be, well, didn't Jesus tell me, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”? Didn't he tell me, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it?” (Matthew 16:24-25)

Out of the anguish of my soul, I will see and be satisfied—one day, finally and completely.

## You need to pray

I don't think my laptop knows what I need. I think my Father knows what I need. Therefore, I will pray to him.

I think your Father knows what you need, too. What do you need? According to Jesus, you need to pray. You need to pray more than you need to get what you pray for. Maybe you need to pray the Lord's Prayer. And your Father, who knows what you need before you ask him, will reward you. How? By giving you what you need. What is that? I don't know. You don't know. Your laptop doesn't know.

Your Father knows.

Our Father 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 lead us not into temptation,  
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## Endnotes

- 1 Those who are familiar with the Lord's Prayer will note that the ending that appears in the King James Version does not appear in the English Standard Version: “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” The earliest manuscripts, uncovered since the publication of the King James Version, omit these words, so they were almost certainly not part of Matthew's original document.
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