

Here's How You Pray

The "Your" and "Us" Relationship

By Dennis Fuqua

I am more in love with my wife now than the day I married her. Logging lots of time together, seeking to understand her, and listening carefully to her will do that.

And I am more in love with The Lord's Prayer now than when I first took it seriously. Logging lots of time together, seeking to understand it, and listening carefully to it will do that, too.

I grew up in a church where this prayer was often part of the service, so I heard it over and over. In Sunday school, I got points for memorizing it. I heard a few sermons about it. But I never really *listened* to the prayer. It was not until I was an adult that I began to listen and then pray it.

After I had pastored for a few years, I knew I wanted to pray more and pray better. The Lord pointed me directly to The Lord's Prayer and challenged me to actually do what He said to do—"Pray like this."

Now, many years later, I continue to do so on a regular basis. It is the passage of Scripture that has shaped my life more than any other passage. You may be very familiar with it, but let's listen to it together from Matthew 6:9-13:

*"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

Give us today 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 the evil one."*

The Backbone

Take a fresh look at these old words. Read them over slowly. Now, let's look at each part of the prayer.

Some of the old catechisms see six requests here because they merge the last two (lead and deliver). That works, but let's separate them and go with seven.

There are two key pronouns that shape the two portions of this prayer. There is a "Your" portion and there is an "us" portion. The first part states God's big desires. The second part states our big needs.

Did you notice that the "Your" portion comes before the "us" portion? Some of us think that prayer only has an "us" portion. But this prayer teaches us that it is right to pray about God's desires before we pray about our needs.

In fact, later in this same chapter, Jesus says we are to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness [God's desires], and all these things [our needs] will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33). That is a great summary of the two parts of this prayer.

There are 14 words (seven pronouns, three nouns, and four verbs) that form the backbone of this prayer: "Your name, Your Kingdom, Your will . . . give us, forgive us, lead us, deliver us." These are the seven topics the Lord told us to pray.

So, I believe Jesus had in mind that we, His followers today, would pray through these seven topics regularly. I hope you don't see this as a legalistic thing but rather as an

invitation. It's an invitation to join Him in what He is doing in the world today.

As I have prayed this way for years, I find it never grows old. Each line is worthy of many hours of meditation.

A Little Expansion

As we look at the three "Your" requests, I suggest that the phrase immediately following the third request ("on earth as it is in heaven") can apply equally to each of them. It's quite clear that heaven is already experiencing each of these things. Heaven does not have these problems, earth does.

So, let's take a quick look at each of the first three requests and how we can pray them. These themes are not limited to Jesus' instruction here in this prayer. They can be seen all throughout Scripture. Let's expand these lines so we can pray from them.

1. Let Your name (Your identity, character, nature, reputation) **be hallowed/holy** (be distinct, revealed, revered). This line is not simply a statement of praise, it is Jesus' first and most important request—that people on earth will know that our heavenly Father is unique. There is no one like Him! Pray that God will be known for who He really is.

2. Let Your Kingdom (Your rulership, government, reign) **come** (be established, expanded, embraced, understood). On many occasions Jesus explained what the Kingdom of God is like. It will come fully in the future, but He instructed us to pray that it would come in significant ways right now.

3. Let Your will (Your desires, plans, purposes) **be done** (be known, accepted, accomplished). This line does not instruct us to pray whatever we'd like, followed by the phrase "if it is Your will." From Scripture we know much about God's will. This line instructs us to pray for *His known will* to be done here on earth.

Personalize It

With these brief expansions in mind, I have found four key words that, when added, can help me pray these first three requests of The Lord's Prayer in a more powerful and personal manner.

The first word can be equally applied to the end of each request. It is the preposition *through*. It works like this:

- Father, let Your name be holy today on earth as it is in heaven *through* me.
- Let Your Kingdom come today on earth as it is in heaven *through* me.
- Let Your will be done today on earth as it is in heaven *through* me.

The next three words are unique to each line. Praying them would look like this:

- Father, let Your name be holy *to* me today so it can be holy *through* me.
- Let Your Kingdom come *in* me today so it can come *through* me.
- Let Your will be done *by* me today so it can be done *through* me.
- Let the Holy Spirit expand and apply each of these lines as you pray.

The "Us" Part

Now, let's turn our attention to the "us" portion of this prayer.

1. Give us (we simply come and ask) **today** (right now) **our daily bread** (that which we need, physically, emotionally, spiritually, relationally—we need Your *provision*). Jesus wants us completely dependent upon Him all the time.

2. Forgive us (we need Your *pardon*, release us from the penalty we deserve) **our debts** (our sins, that which we owe You) **as we forgive** (as we also release, remove the penalty from) **our debtors** (those who sin against us). Granting and receiving forgiveness is essential to all healthy relationships.

3. Lead us (we need Your *direction*) **not into temptation** (any substitute for finding fullness in Jesus). When we follow the Lord's leadership, He is glorified, our lives go better, and His Kingdom is expanded.

4. Deliver us (we need Your *protection*) **from the evil one** (the accuser, the father of all lies). We dare not assume our spiritual protection or that of our loved ones. We should follow Jesus' instructions to pray that the influence of the evil one will be restricted.

Fresh Ways to Pray

This prayer has shaped my life more than any other passage of Scripture. One time as I was praying through each of these seven requests, I prayed through the first three in a manner I mentioned previously. When I came to the fourth request, for some reason I prayed it like this: "Give me what I need for this day so that Your name will be seen as holy through me."

I paused, sensing that what I just prayed fit perfectly with God's desires. So, I prayed the line again and added "so that Your Kingdom will be more advanced and established here in my world as it is in heaven." Again, I sensed this was right on track with God's purposes.

This launched me into a new understanding of The Lord's Prayer. I saw that the first and second parts of the prayer are not independent of one another. It seems there really is no "us" part after all! What seems to be the "us" portion is really designed to be the means by which the "Your" portion is

accomplished.

I am convinced the best way to pray the requests of the second half is to tie them into the first half. How can we do that?

The numbers below offer ways to see the relationship between these two halves in prayer. Begin with the numbered requests on the top and combine it with one of the "BY" lines. Or begin with the phrases under "BY" and combine them with the "so that" phrases.

1. Let Your name be holy
2. Let Your Kingdom come
3. Let Your will be done

BY

- A. Giving us our daily bread
- B. Forgiving us of our debts
- C. Leading us not into temptation
- D. Delivering us from the evil one

1. Give us our daily bread
2. Forgive us our debts
3. Let us not into temptation
4. Deliver us from the evil one

SO THAT

- A. Your name will be holy
- B. Your Kingdom will come
- C. Your will be done

This will give you 24 fresh ways to pray from this prayer. For example, "Lord, let Your Kingdom come *by* giving us our daily bread." Or, "Lord, please give me what I need for this day *so that* Your will is accomplished."

Pray in this way, but don't be satisfied with only praying these short phrases. Let the Holy Spirit expand each line. If

you let Him, you will find many marvelous ways to pray from these simple words.

Pray and Live

As I have prayed this prayer for many years, I find it is the best model prayer I could hope for—and it has spilled over to become the curriculum for my life. As I pray this way, it is clear I should also live this way.

I desire to treat His name as though it is holy—and to live in such a way that He will be seen here on earth as He really is. I want His Kingdom to shape me and my world. I am committed to His will rather than my will because of this prayer. I have grown in my dependence upon Him and my awareness that only He can supply what I really need. I am more forgiving and more aware of the cost of my forgiveness. I increasingly allow Him to lead me in paths of righteousness. And I have seen more and more of His excellent deliverance.

My hope—and more importantly, Jesus' hope—is that you grow in your love for this prayer by logging time with it, listening carefully to it, seeking to understand it, praying it, and living it.

It's how Jesus wants us to pray.

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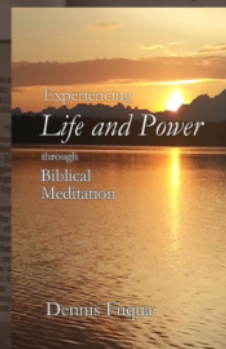
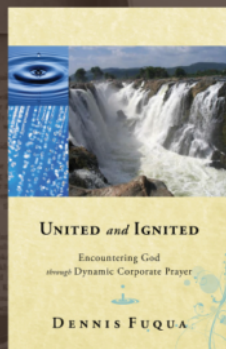
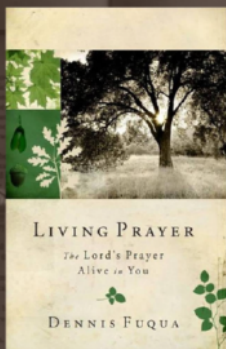
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