What Is the Purpose of the Lord's Prayer?
Scripture: Matthew 6
Code: BQ51010

After warning against those perversions that had so corrupted Jewish prayer life, our Lord gives a divine pattern by which kingdom citizens can pray in a way that is pleasing to God.

That the prayer Jesus is about to give was not meant to be repeated as a prayer itself is clear for several reasons. First, in the present passage it is introduced with the words, **Pray, then, in this way** . In the account in Luke the disciples did not ask Jesus to teach them a prayer but to teach them *how* to pray (Luke 11:1). *Houtos oun* (**then, in this way**) means literally, “Thus therefore,” and frequently carried the idea of “along these lines” or “in the following manner.” Second, Jesus had just warned His followers *not* to pray with “meaningless repetition” (v. 7). To then give a prayer whose primary purpose was to be recited verbatim would have been an obvious contradiction of Himself. Third, nowhere in the New Testament-gospels, Acts, or epistles-do we find an instance of that or any other prayer being repeated by anyone or used in a repetitious, ritualistic manner by a group.

The Lord’s Prayer, or more accurately, the Disciples’ Prayer, is not a set group of words to repeat. It is fine to recite it, as we recite many parts of Scripture. It is certainly fine to memorize it and to rehearse it in our minds and meditate on it in our hearts. But it is not so much a prayer in itself as it is a skeleton which believers are to flesh out with their own words of praise, adoration, petitions, and so on. It is not a substitute for our own prayers but a guide for them.

In fewer than seventy words we find a masterpiece of the infinite mind of God, who alone could compress every conceivable element of true prayer into such a brief and simple form-a form that even a young child can understand but the most mature believer cannot fully comprehend.

Another indication of the prayer’s divine comprehensiveness is seen in the seemingly endless schemes by which it can be outlined. When outlined from the perspective of our relationship to God, we see: **Our Father** showing the father/child relationship; **hallowed be Thy name**, the deity/worshiper; **Thy kingdom come**, the sovereign/subject; **Thy will be done**, the master/servant; **give us this day our daily bread**, the benefactor/beneficiary; **forgive us our debts**, the Savior/sinner; and **do not lead us into temptation**, the guide/pilgrim.

From the perspective of the attitude and spirit of prayer, **Our** reflects unselfishness; **Father** reflects family devotion; **hallowed be Thy name**, reverence; **Thy kingdom come**, loyalty; **Thy will be done**, submission; **give us this day our daily bread**, dependence; **forgive us our debts**, penitence; **do**

not lead us into temptation, humility; **Thine is the kingdom**, triumph; **and the glory**, exultation; and **forever**, hope.

In similar ways the prayer can be outlined to show (1) the balance of God's glory and our need; (2) the threefold purpose of prayer: to hallow God's name, bring in His kingdom, and do His will; and (3) the approach of present (**give us this day our daily bread**), past (**forgive us our debts**), and future (**do not lead us into temptation**).

Those are but a brief sampling of the ways in which Jesus' magnificent diamond of prayer may be cut.

The purpose of prayer is seen more in the overall thrust of these five verses than in any particular word or phrase. From beginning to end the focus is on God, on His adoration, worthiness, and glory. Every aspect of true righteousness, the righteousness that characterizes God's kingdom citizens, focuses on Him. Prayer could hardly be an exception. Prayer is not trying to get God to agree with us or to provide for our selfish desires. Prayer is affirming God's sovereignty, righteousness, and majesty and seeking to conform our desires and our purposes to His will and glory.

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