

# COMMENTARY ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

## Matthew 6:9-15

We're in the world. And we're for it. But we're not *of* it. We don't march to it's beat. We march to a beat that transcends this city and its culture, this world and its ways. It's a beat from above. It's the beat of Christ's heart. Its rhythm is his timeless wisdom. Its tempo is his time-tested love. And the Sermon on the Mt is the song. In this Sermon, Christ teaches us to live the right way up, in an upside down world. This commentary, written by Terran Williams, draws from some of the best available sources. It will aid in individuals and groups in their study of Christ's teaching in his Manifesto of Life in the Kingdom, Matthew 5-7.

### Outline of the Sermon on the Mount

- the life God blesses (5:1-12)
- the call to influence (5:13-16)
- love for the scriptures (5:17-20)
- radical love (5:21-48)
- spirituality before the audience of One (6:1-18)
- pursuing that which is worthy of our lives (6:19-24)
- overcoming anxiety about the future and preoccupation with not-so-important things (6:25-34)
- how *not* to help each other change (7:1-6)
- strong encouragements to pray and love (7:7-12)
- responding to the Sermon's call to radical living (7:13-29)

## Matthew 6:9-15 - THE LORD'S PRAYER

9 This, then, is how you should pray:

**There are several things to keep touching on in any healthy prayer life.**

- Jesus gives his disciples what has been called "the Lord's prayer". It is not the prayer he himself prayed (John 17, rather, is just that). It is the prayer we are to pray. All disciples of Jesus should memorize it, which is easy to do. There are two ways we can use this prayer: 1) We can pray it word for word (which is what Luke 11:2 suggests), giving thought to the words and not just repeating it mindlessly and mechanically (which is something Jesus has just condemned in verse 7). 2) We can use it as a pattern that reminds us of some themes to keep returning to in our prayer life, which is what this verse suggests with the line, this is "how (not 'what') you should pray". This is the approach I generally take, and it's a helpful prayer because it's easy to, according to one's level of faith or personality, to gravitate to some themes and neglect others. This prayer helps us to keep covering the most important bases or themes (as you will see in this commentary I propose five basic themes) when making contact with our Father through prayer.
- My personal recommendation is that we study the prayer, and write our own paraphrase of it, so that we understand it deeply. This is also because some of the concepts in this prayer can elude us, and paraphrasing it in our words shows that we are attempting to really understand it.

'Our Father in heaven

**First theme to revisit when we pray: *remind yourself who it is you're praying to.***

- The opening line is, “Our Father in heaven”. He is our loving Father. We have the security and privilege of being called his sons and daughters. We have access to him. Because of the acceptance he has bestowed on us, we don’t need to come grovelling to him. We can be assured that he is more eager to hear from us than we are to speak to him. We really matter to him. And he thrives on our love for him. Not that he needs to be loved, just that he wants to be loved.
- The fact that he is “our” Father and not just “my” Father reminds us that we are not alone in our relationship with him. All over the world, there are millions of people that enjoy the same access to him through his Son. This is also the reason that we do not just pray on our own, but also in prayer meetings with others.
- He is “in heaven”. The Greek is “in heavens”. In the Jewish mind “the heavens” consisted of three possible things: 1) the atmosphere immediately surrounding us; 2) the sky above; and 3) the realm and place where God has his throne. When we think of our Father in heaven, we can therefore think of him both as extremely close, and extremely exalted. The theological terms are “immanence” (God is nearby and accessible) and “transcendent” (God is exalted in authority and sovereignty, and is unimaginably great). Our Father is both good, and great, both close and exalted, both immanent and transcendent. When we pray we remind ourselves that this is the Father we approach! What a privilege.

hallowed be your name  
 10 your kingdom come,  
 your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

**Second theme to revisit when we pray: Pray for the spread of God’s fame and reign.**

- We are to pray: 1) that his name would be hallowed; 2) that his kingdom would come; and 3) that his will gets done. Let’s focus on these one at a time:
- **“Hallowed be your name”**. God’s name simply speaks of God’s reputation. The word “hallowed” here means “cherished, held as something special, prized, praised”. God is a wonderful, holy God. But sadly, so few people realise this. The lies of the devil, and the hardness of the human heart, and the failures of God’s people to represent him well have led many to not cherish or praise God at all. Rather he is belittled, ignored, marginalized, accused and avoided. God’s name is not hallowed. People have no idea how holy and wonderful God really is. God wants to be known for who he is. This is a driving passion of God. Listen to God speak in Isaiah 48:9,11: “For my own name’s sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise ... for my own sake, for my own sake I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.”
- **“Your kingdom come”**. God is a king who reigns with wisdom, authority and power. And we live in a world that is full of sin and brokenness and

lack. "... the whole world is under the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). The devil has brought great damage to people and culture. And the devil has done this through the sinfulness, unbelief, misinformation and disobedience of humanity. The desperate need is for God to break in, and reveal his kingly authority, wisdom and power. Ultimately God's kingdom will undo all the works of the devil, and will displace every rebellious kingdom in humanity and culture. All pain and tears, tiredness and sickness, sin and depravity, ignorance and malice, death and divorce, tragedy and tyranny will be done with. And God's kingdom will be glorious – devoid of all these things. But already now, God's kingdom advances and "comes" and undoes some of these things. Not completely, but in part. Not fully, but progressively. Already now, through the ministry of the Word and the Spirit we taste the powers of the coming age (Hebrews 6:5). This is what it means to see God's kingdom come.

- **"Your will be done"**. Tragically, fallen humanity has set itself up as God's rival and enemy. Instead of willingly embracing his wisdom, authority and leadership, we refuse it. This brings judgment and destruction into our lives and culture. God longs for us to freely and trustingly yield to him. He wants to do us good. And he wants us to do good. He has chosen to work in this world through willing human instruments. For God's will to be done, more and more people need to more and more readily yield to him. Part of what it means for God's will to be done is that God's kingdom overcomes everything that resists him.
- **"On earth as it is in heaven"**. Heaven, the place of God's throne, is the place where God's kingdom is fully enjoyed, and God's will is totally embraced. God's passion is that in this small corner of the universe, in the human race and on planet earth, his kingdom would come, and his will be freely embraced. Ultimately, this is what will happen. We're told that the future age is not just about heaven, but about "the new heaven and the new earth". And it appears that heaven and earth will intermingle – for example, Revelation figuratively describes "the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God" (Revelation 21:1-2). But we don't have to wait. Already now through our prayers, and through Jesus, heaven is partly and progressively manifesting on earth.
- How should these three themes (God's name being hallowed, his kingdom coming, his will done) be prayed? There are at least four different ways to pray them:
  - 1) We can pray these words as a *prayer of passion*. For example, we pray, "God, stir in me a passion for your name, a passion for your kingdom coming, a passion for your will to be done. Let me want what you want, Father. Let my life be consumed by everything that deeply matters to you."
  - 2) We can pray these words as a *prayer of surrender*. For example, we can pray, "God, not my name, but your name be hallowed. Not my kingdom, but your kingdom come. Not my will, but your will be done. I repent for living like I am the centre of the universe. I surrender my little kingdom into your great, big kingdom."
  - 3) We can pray these words as a *prayer of availability*. For example, we can pray, "God, use me to lift up your name, to advance your kingdom,

to get your will done. Let my life be on earth a landing zone for heaven.”

- 4) We can pray these words as a *prayer of intercession*. We can pray them over a million different spheres and situations. For example, we might pray them over a person, or over our family, or over our church, or over a ministry trip, or over a church-plant, or over a tragic situation, or over a structural evil in society such as injustice, or over an entire nation. For example, if praying for the advance of the gospel in India, we could pray, “Let your name be made famous in India; let people discover what a wonderful God you are. Let your kingdom come in India; reveal your power and glory in evangelism efforts, in confirming signs and wonders, and in effective church planting. Let your will be done – radically embolden the church to live and preach the gospel, and radically cut people’s hearts to accept the gospel.” Eaton (pg 124), speaking of the potential global impact of our prayers, writes, “We travel the world from our little home, not in the luxury of a jumbo jet, but on the wings of prayer.”

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| 11 Give us today our daily bread. |
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### Third theme to revisit when we pray: Pray for practical provision.

- Once we have prayed about the big things that really matter to God, Jesus instructs us to pray about the somewhat smaller things that really matter to us. But these things also matter to God, since he is our Father! It is not a sign of spirituality to only pray about the big things, and not the smaller things. Psalm 35:27 says, “The LORD be exalted, who delights in the well-being of his servant.” This, I think, captures the flow of the Lord’s Prayer: the first three clauses have to do with the LORD being exalted, while the last three clauses have to do with us, the servants who seek to exalt him and advance his kingdom, being looked after by God. He delights in his kingdom advancing, and he delights in our well-being. After all, if we, the instruments of his kingdom, are not well, then we cannot advance his kingdom sufficiently. There are three things that have to do with our well-being that Christ instructs us to pray about. Firstly, we pray for our physical well-being (v11). Then we pray for our relational well-being (both our relationship with God and others) (v12). Lastly, we pray for our spiritual well-being (v13).
- “***Give us today our daily bread***”. We are to pray for our physical well-being. Jesus teaches us that we should get in the habit of first speaking about the big things (v9-11d) before speaking about the smaller things such as asking for daily bread. Why is this? It is because we tend to get caught up in ourselves, and forget that it is not ultimately about us, but rather it is about God. By focusing on the big things first, we get the right perspective on things. We’re less panicky and self-absorbed in our prayers. “Bread,” says Luther, “refers to everything necessary for the preservation of life, like good food, a healthy body, good weather, house, home, wife, children, good government and peace.” Although our Father is not stingy (Matthew 15:37 reminds us that he sometimes enjoys

giving us baskets full of leftovers), we are not to ask God to satisfy our greed but our needs. The word “give” reminds us that even the food that we have paid for, with the money we have earned, with the skills we have developed, and the energy we have expended, is food that comes from him. After all, the food, the money, the skills, the energy, and the opportunities all ultimately come from him (see Deuteronomy 8:18). The word “daily” means “for the coming day”. If prayed at night, it means for the next day. If prayed in the morning, it means for this day. As we seek first his kingdom, he promises to provide for us. However, he expects us to express our dependency on him by praying for our most basic needs. Then we can rest, anxiety-free, in the expectation of his provision. “The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing” (Psalm 34:10). Interestingly, we may be the agents through whom God answers other people’s prayers – Jesus teaches us to give to the hungry (Matthew 25:35).

12 Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

**Fourth theme to revisit when we pray: Pray for the restoring of relationships.**

- *“Forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors”*. We are to pray for our relational well-being (both vertically with God, and horizontally with each other).
- To be in debt here means to have let God and each other down. In a sense we “owe” them because of our failures. Later, Paul will explain that they are “justified”, which means that once and for all our standing before God has changed, and we are accepted by him, and are free from the possibility of eternal condemnation. Is that what Jesus is speaking about here – that we would be justified by God? No, Jesus is speaking to his disciples who already have a relationship with God. Their justification is not at stake. What is at stake is the daily enjoyment of intimacy with their Father. Sin, and the guilt we feel, has a way of disrupting our relationship with God. Jesus is instructing us to simply own up to our sin, our letting God down, and to ask him to cleanse us from the guilt of it, so that we can enjoy intimacy with him again. For the disciple of Jesus, intimacy with the Father is as important to the soul, as food is important for the body. We must regularly “come clean” before God. We are to freshly appeal to the wonderful, undeserved mercy and grace of our Father toward us.
- But Jesus is not only interested in the well-being of our relationship with the Father. He is also interested in the well-being of our relationships with each other, within the community of faith. That is why we are to also freshly release grace and mercy to each other as we pray. Note that Jesus is not here teaching that our forgiveness toward others earns us the Father’s forgiveness. He teaches in this verse that the two are interconnected. As we receive the Father’s undeserved kindness and mercy, so we extend it to others. And as we extend God’s mercy to

others, we freshly experience the Father's compassion and grace toward us. Instead of making people pay for their wrongdoing toward us, we simply cancel the debt, and graciously give them another chance.

- Note that Jesus adds more commentary to this part of the Lord's Prayer immediately after (see verses 14-15). See commentary below.

13 And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.'

**Fifth theme to revisit when we pray: Pray for deliverance from temptation and trials.**

- ***“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one”.***  
We are to pray for our spiritual and moral well-being. The word “temptation” refers to both temptations (i.e. enticements to sin) and testing (i.e. the experience of great pressure and of trials). We will be tempted (see 1 Corinthians 10:13), and we will be tested (see James 1:2). There is no way around this. God tests us. Satan tempts us (note that God cannot tempt us (see James 1:13-14). What does it mean to pray, “Lead us not into temptation and testing”? It seems to have two meanings. Firstly, as Eaton (pg 129) argues that it means, “When I am tempted or tested, let me not be so overwhelmed that I fall ‘into’ it.” Eaton explains that the word “into” is the main point. We will be tempted and tested, but with God's help, we can stop ourselves from falling “into” sin. By God's grace, we will remain standing strong. Secondly, as Dallas Willard (pg 295) argues it means, “Help me to avoid temptations and trials altogether.” In other words, it is a no confidence vote in our own ability to stand. If this interpretation is correct, it means that we can reduce our temptations and trials merely by asking God to spare us from them entirely. Both interpretations have the same emphasis: the temptation to give up, or to lose faith, or to sin can be very great, and in ourselves we don't have what it takes, so God's grace is greatly needed. We need his grace to both overcome the temptation, and sometimes even avoid the temptation entirely. The flow of the Lord's Prayer is profound. We start with declarations of how loving, powerful and holy God is. And we end with confessions of how unloving, weak and sinful we can be. The phrase, “deliver us from the evil one” reminds us that it is Satan, not God, who seeks to entice us to sin. He is very sly and powerful in his tactics to defeat us. Only Jesus has the power to overcome him (see Matthew 4:1-11, and 1 John 3:8). Although Satan is stronger than us, if we rely on God's grace we can overcome him, and his attacks on our lives. Wonderfully, “greater is he who lives in you (Jesus) than he who lives in the world (Satan)” (1 John 4:4). When we pray for deliverance, what are we praying? We are praying at least three different things. We are praying that God will spare us from trials. We are praying that God will put a sudden end to some trials we are facing. And we are praying that God will help us to faithfully persevere through some trials. We trust God, our loving Father, to decide which

trials to help us avoid, which trials to deliver us from, and which trials to deliver us through.

14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

**Disciples experience God’s forgiveness to the extent they forgive others.**

- Jesus has just taught them what we call “the Lord’s Prayer”. One line in it is: “forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors” (v12). Now that he has finished teaching them the prayer, he draws more emphasis to the theme of receiving and giving forgiveness, and he explains the meaning of the line.
- What must we do to experience God’s forgiveness? It depends on whether you’re a Christian or not. If you’re not a Christian, you need to put your trust in Christ and in his work on the cross, and your sins will be forgiven – past, present and future. Amazingly, Christ will no longer count your sins against you (2 Corinthians 5:19), and you need not fear eternal condemnation (Romans 8:1). The theological term for this once-in-a-life-time, eternal forgiveness is “justification”. It refers to an objective forgiveness in the sight of God. It’s a change that takes place not so much in our heart, as much as it happens in heaven. Even if we do not feel the forgiveness, if we have put our trust in Jesus, this eternal forgiveness is ours. But, if we’re Christians already then we need not fear the loss of acceptance by God. But what we must fear is the loss of the experience of forgiveness. This is the second kind of forgiveness. It is not something that happens in heaven, but rather in our hearts. It is what we need to regularly re-experience. It is that spiritual sense where the Spirit witnesses to our hearts that all is well between us and God, and that we need not carry a guilty conscience for our recent failures.
- *What do we, as Christians, need to do to re-experience God’s forgiveness in our hearts?* Obviously, we need to confess our sins to him and trust in the forgiving nature of God (1 John 1:9, Psalm 103:3). But Jesus here teaches another key to freshly experiencing God’s forgiveness in our hearts: we need to extend forgiveness to others. These verses can be paraphrased like this: “If you, a disciple, forgive others, you will experience your Father’s forgiveness toward you. But if you fail to forgive others, you will not be able to enjoy the experience of the Father’s forgiveness towards you.”
- Forgiving others is something that Jesus taught extensively on. His great blood-bought forgiveness towards us is what should energize our not-as-costly forgiveness towards others (Matthew 18:21-35). Forgiveness is a posture of mercy towards people who sometimes wrong us again and again. We need to keep on refusing ourselves the right to get even – even up to seven times a day (Luke 17:3-4).

**Sources used** - Much reference will be made to these sources throughout this commentary. Each time the author and the page number is mentioned, but not the book title.

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