

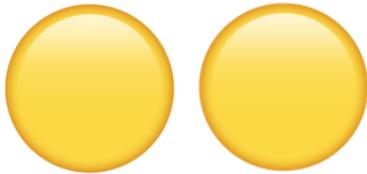
A Father to hear you

Presbyterian scholar, theologian, and pastor Eugene Peterson, who composed *The Message* version of the Bible, presented Matthew 6:5-8 this way:

⁵ “And when you come before God, don’t turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat? ⁶ Here’s what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace. ⁷⁻⁸ The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They’re full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don’t fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need.”

What a great phrase and powerful argument: *“This is your Father you are dealing with.”* And that’s what makes the difference for a believer when it comes to prayer.

Icebreaker



Create an emoji to capture the challenge of having to ask an awkward question to a person who is an authority figure, but not your parent. (Perhaps like raising your hand in class, or asking your boss for a raise.) Now draw a second, but this time for when the question is put to someone you love and to someone who loves you. Share-screen it, if you can, and reward the best one.

Read: Matthew 6:1, 5-15

¹ “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

⁵ “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ “This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

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

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

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

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

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.”

Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount is not a religious program for getting into heaven. It’s the description of how every Christian is to live out their Christian life on earth. When a person attempts to find the favour of God by self-righteousness, their living quickly becomes one of performance and hypocrisy. The Pharisees were masters of such performing arts, particularly in the areas of giving, praying and fasting, and earned the ire of Jesus for misrepresenting the Christian Faith. When a person submits to God’s righteousness, that is, when they accept God’s provision of perfect righteousness in Jesus, then giving, praying and fasting are transformed from the performing arts of religion and ritual, to the privileged acts of joy and duty.

Question 1

In directing us to pray secretly, do you think that Jesus is forbidding public prayer? What is the issue at stake? (Read and consider verses 1, 2, 5 and 16 before giving your answer.)

Question 2

The Old Testament story of the prophet Elijah in contest with the pagan prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18) is a perfect illustration of verse 7, where Jesus warns of the danger of misplaced confidence in volume and verbiage. What reason does Jesus give in verse 8 to encourage us not to babble in prayer? (Thinking further on the Elijah story, what sort of god is Baal, the supposed deity of lightning, to not even light one small fire in response to the bloodied prayers of his devotees? (1 Kings 18:28,29)).



Question 3

When a person converts from Islam to Christianity, one of their greatest joys is to address God as Father. (Muslims are forbidden to address Allah in this way.) If you have grown up in the Christian Faith, is this a joy and wonder that you need to recapture?

Question 4

What do you think the word 'hallowed' means? Stop and do some quick research, and come up with a few synonyms. What is this word attempting to explain about the character and ways of God?

Question 5

The prayer for the provision of our daily bread has a broad application. One of the best expansions of this petition is Agur's prayer in the Book of Proverbs (30):

⁷ *"Two things I ask of you, Lord; do not refuse me before I die:*

⁸ *Keep falsehood and lies far from me;*

give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.

⁹ *Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you, and say, 'Who is the Lord?'*

Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God.

The first thing that Agur asks is for commitment to speak the truth. In one word, what is the second? (See also Paul's encouragement on this topic in Philippians 4:10-13).

Question 6

In the order of petitions in the Lord's Prayer, why do you think the one about provision (v11) precedes the one about pardon (v12)? (This is a hard question, especially for those who have been taught to pray using the acronym, ACTS, standing for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.)



Case Study 1

Every time that Brian prays, he falls into the trap of saying "Dear God", then blurting out his own needs. Not only that, but when he does so, he suddenly finds his mind swimming with thoughts associated with those needs. Then when he comes to his senses, he feels conscience-stricken that he is so preoccupied with his own needs and has not prayed for others, nor expressed any appreciation for God. And then because he feels like a hypocrite, he leaves off prayer, and moves on with the day feeling discouraged and defeated. What suggestions can you make (from the text and from your own experience) to help and encourage our friend Brian?

If you're running short of time, read the next three issues efficiently, so that you have time to pray at the end.

Issue 1



What happened to that sentence at the end of the Lord's Prayer that says: "For Yours is the kingdom, the power and glory, forever and ever, Amen"?

In the earliest Greek manuscripts that have so far been found, the above sentence does not appear, which raises the question of how it came to be included, (or omitted if one supposes that there are even earlier Greek manuscripts yet to be discovered that contained this sentence). Most theologians propose that the sentence is a borrowing from King David's prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:11: *'Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom...'*

and inserted to give the Lord's Prayer a sense of completion and finale. There is of course nothing wrong with the theology of the sentence, nor in using the words in a formal recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

Issue 2



The repetition of the petition about forgiveness in verse 14 and 15 indicates that this matter is serious and important to God. But many Christians young and old have wondered if it implies that our salvation is dependent on our ability to forgive those who have offended us.

The solution is as follows: Our justification (basis for going to heaven) is not grounded in our righteousness but in the perfect righteousness of Christ. This means that the forgiveness that we grant to others, or withhold from others, is not a factor in our justification. Having said that, it most certainly is a factor in our sanctification, and in our happiness and holiness before God. To struggle therefore with forgiving a person who has offended you does not cast a doubt on your salvation, but if withheld, it does bring a shadow into your relationship with God, and puts you not under the 'wrath of God' but under the 'Father's frown'. Forgiving another person therefore is vitally important not just to the person who desires to be forgiven, but to our own peace and happiness with God and progress in the Christian life.

Issue 3



Is it "Deliver us from evil", or "Deliver us from the Evil One"?

Both translations are possible, but the second meaning is to be preferred. The devil is a real threat to our progress in the Christian life. The petition makes us conscious of spiritual opposition, and calls us to humbly walk with God. This may be a petition that we need to take more seriously. (See Eph 6:10-18).

Prayer

Finish in prayer – Have several (four if possible) members of your group offer some short petitions in the 'suggested but not strict' order of *Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication*; and then pray together the Lord's Prayer to conclude, remembering to offer a hearty 'Amen', ('truth', meaning "That's true", or "May it be so".)

⁹ Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.
¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom,
the power and glory, forever and ever. Amen.

