

Praying the Lord's Prayer

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Well, as you guys know, we are in between book studies because we just finished Jeremiah last week. And this is actually the last Wednesday I'm going to be with you for a few weeks. Sue and I are going to be taking off Sunday, probably sometime after church, and start heading toward the East.

So tonight we're going to just kind of share a little bit from the Scriptures on prayer. So I'm going to have you open up your Bible to Matthew chapter 6. So join me there, please.

We don't normally do the New Testament on Wednesday night, but of course, when we're between books, anything goes as long as it's in the Bible, right? Yeah. Matthew chapter 6. Go ahead and turn there. Let's open up in prayer.

Heavenly Father, as we dive into the Scriptures this evening, we pray for Your Spirit to guide and open our hearts to the wisdom from heaven. We need Your grace every time we open up the scriptures. We need Your help. We need wisdom. We need discernment. We need understanding. And we pray that You would nourish our hearts tonight and equip us for the days that lie ahead. We look to You, Father, in Jesus' precious name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Over the 30 years that I've been here, I have made no secret of the fact that, from time to time, I have found keeping a consistent and regular prayer life kind of a challenge, and you guys know that. However, I've also discovered along the way, along the path, that there are things that help me to stay on track as it relates to prayer—making praying easier, making it more fruitful.

I don't think I'm alone when I say that prayer can be a challenge. I think that—I know that—there are people who are gifted with a ministry of prayer, and I love those folks. I really do. I try to figure out who they are and get them on our prayer warriors group. We have this small group of people that we call our prayer warriors, and they are people who are specifically gifted with prayer.

And what I mean by gifted is, they just fall to their knees easily and spend time in prayer easily. Intercession just rolls off their hearts. And for the rest of us, it's a challenge, and we do our best to kind of keep moving in the right direction.

Some of the things that I have found to be helpful in my own life to kind of keep praying is—one of them is—accountability. And what that means is praying alongside others, planning times of prayer where people have an

expectation that we're going to get together and pray. It's a good thing to do if you have a weakness as it relates to anything, whether it's staying consistently in the Word, or staying in prayer, or staying in fellowship.

Find ways to connect yourself with other people where someone's counting on you to do that. Where we're going to meet every day, Friday at 5 o'clock, and we're going to spend some time in prayer. Or we're going to get together, call each other maybe daily, and read through a chapter of the Bible. Or we're going to—something where there's an expectation. I find that that really helps me. In fact, it's been a huge blessing.

Another helpful tool for me is to follow a pattern for prayer. And there are several patterns that have been given to us by creative people who have found ways to use acrostics or things to just guide us in prayer. Sometimes people will have learned how to read through a chapter of the Bible and make prayer points from what they read, and then spend time in prayer with that. And that sort of thing can all be very, very helpful.

But our Lord gave us a pattern for prayer. And of course, we call it the Lord's Prayer, where He showed us how to pray. So if you haven't turned there yet, we're in Matthew chapter 6, and we're going to be looking here, as you can kind of see on the screen, about praying the Lord's Prayer.

We've talked about this in the past, but it's been years since we have, and it was time to revisit it and talk again about this beautiful model for prayer. Of course, Jesus modeled prayer not just in the Lord's Prayer of giving us a guideline for prayer—He modeled it by doing it.

Unfortunately, most of the time that Jesus spent in prayer is hidden for us in mystery. We don't know what He said in those times, because Jesus got away alone with His Heavenly Father and spent that time in prayer. However, we are fortunate to have a few of His prayers recorded for us in the Bible, and they are wonderful.

But when we come to this section of scripture, we find Jesus not just praying in front of us, but speaking to us about prayer and about how we ought to pray. And again, we call it the Lord's Prayer because it is the pattern He gave for us. And I use the word pattern very purposefully, because it is not to be spoken in a repetitious and mindless sort of a way—which is really interesting because Jesus even talks in this section about not praying that way. He talks—and we'll get into that.

But unfortunately, many times we've taken the Lord's Prayer and we've turned it into something that we repeat by rote, by memorization. And I don't know about you, but I can recite things that I've memorized without even thinking about

them. I can be thinking about the next football game, or what we're going to have for dinner, or what I need to do when I get home or something, while I'm reciting something that is kind of just locked away in my memory.

And unfortunately, the Lord's prayer has become that for some. We can say it. But I don't think we were ever meant to just say it. I believe that Jesus was giving us a pattern. He was giving us a blueprint. He was giving us a guideline. And I believe that what the Lord wanted us to do was to meditate on the different elements of the Lord's prayer so that it might birth in us a greater understanding of what these elements are talking about—not something to recite, but something to understand in a broader, more dynamic sort of a sense.

And that's what we're going to try to do this evening. As we go through this prayer, we're going to be getting into this and seeing not just what the Lord is saying, but what He wants us to know and what He wants us to adopt for our time in prayer.

Now, before Jesus actually gets into what we call the Lord's Prayer, if you begin with me looking at verse 5, He's going to take a moment to speak for just a moment about things to avoid when it comes to prayer. And we call these pitfalls.

Verses 5 through 5: He says here in verse 5, *"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."* (ESV)

The first thing Jesus speaks about as a pitfall to prayer is hypocrisy. And this kind of hypocrisy that He refers to is completely opposite of what prayer ought to be. In fact, it defeats the purpose and the nature of prayer. Why? Because prayer is a focus on God. And He's talking about people who make prayer a focus on themselves.

It's all about me. It's all about getting people to hear me, getting people to see me, and getting people to be impressed with me. And so, they are using prayer for a hypocritical purpose. It's all about themselves. And again, that defeats the whole focus of prayer.

Prayer is a way that God has given us to switch our focus. The world is constantly tempting us to focus on ourselves, constantly. Everything in the world, everything in the world wants me to think about me and is constantly encouraging me to think about me. And when I begin to pray, the goal is to focus on God—to make Him the focal point of my effort, my energy, my desire, and so forth.

So Jesus is speaking in this verse about people who just love to pray so that others can see and hear them. And again, it defers the prayer—the whole purpose of prayer—from glorifying God to glorifying self. And that's not what we're supposed to be doing.

But Jesus tells such a person here that whatever admiration they get from others by being heard and seen—whatever response of awe that someone gives them, wow, what a great prayer. Man, does he know how to pray. She really knows how to say the right words—whatever they get, that's all they're going to get. That's what Jesus says. They've received their reward in full. In other words, the prayer of such an individual is empty and ineffectual, versus the prayer of a righteous man that is powerful and effective.

So how are we encouraged to pray? Jesus never speaks of something that we shouldn't do without telling us something we should. And in verse 6, He outlines what we ought to do as it relates to prayer. And He says, “*But when you pray (now He’s talking to believers), 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.*”

And what He’s talking about here is the true nature of prayer. It's all about meeting with God. Now, that's not to say that we can't get together with a small group of people and pray together. And there's nothing wrong with that, and we ought to do it. In fact, even if it's a large group of people, it doesn't really matter. There's nothing wrong with group prayer, coming together in group prayer. But there needs to be a time in our lives where we shut out the rest of the world and we get alone with God—meeting with Him.

And Jesus is calling believers in this verse to an expression of their faith that can't help but be authentic and genuine because there's nobody watching. There's nobody there. There's nobody to impress. There's nobody to leave in awe. It's just you and God. And that creates a genuineness and a reality to what's happening in prayer that takes away so many of those pitfall issues and brings it down to the simple aspect of you and God.

And so, this is the beauty—just getting alone with God. I don't know how much time you spend alone with God. I would have to say I probably don't spend enough time alone with God. But it's an important thing to do.

And next, Jesus deals with the words that people pray. In verse 7, He begins, and He says, “*And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do* (Your Bible, if you have a different translation, may say *meaningless repetitions*). I believe that's the New American Standard Bible (NASB). The 1984 revision of the NIV says, “*babbling*.” Don't be babbling or don't babble

like the Gentiles or the pagans. He goes on to say), *“for they think that they will be heard for their many words. (or in other words, because of their many words, he says) ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”*

And that's the key to the whole thing about words. The key is: your Father already knows, your Father already knows.

And that's so important because—think about it for a minute—let's say you're going to talk to your boss. And you come in there with a request, and you get in there and you sit down, and the boss stops you and says, listen, I already know exactly what you're going to ask. As soon as he says that to you, you're going to change the way you speak about this. You don't have to now—you don't have to explain. You can just get right to it, can't you? Because he knows.

Well, what Jesus is saying related to the needs that you and I bring before the Father is: God already knows. He knows before you even come to Him what those needs are. So you don't have to sit and explain the situation or think that somehow with your many words that's going to help necessarily.

And He reminds us here that the amount of our words is not the issue when we come to Him in prayer. Jesus speaks in these verses of those who believe that the key to effective prayer is to speak a lot of words or to keep talking. And He says that's unnecessary because God already knows.

Now, I want to be careful here when we talk about too many words. I want to be careful that we don't undermine another principle in prayer, which is to persevere in prayer. They're not the same thing. It's one thing to babble and to keep talking because you think that multiplying words is going to make a difference. It's another thing to persevere in prayer or to keep pressing on in prayer over a protracted period of time. That is something we are told to do. We are to keep praying. We are not to pray or babble repetitiously, or with the multiplication of words simply for the sake of words.

You might remember in the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus actually told a parable. I won't give you the parable, but let me show you on the screen where it says,

Luke 18:1 (NIV84)

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

And you can take time to read that parable, but He told us right there what the whole purpose of the parable was—so that they would pray and not give up. Again, that's not adding words that are meaningless. That's adding prayer and continuing in it—prayer. We've talked about that in the past.

So having given us these warnings that He has concerning what not to do and what to do related to prayer, He goes on in verse 9 to say, *“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.’”*

And the first thing—which is the way we address the Lord—is what our Lord brings out here, because when we say or start our prayers with *“Our Father...”* it reminds us of something, and that is that God wants this time of prayer to be personal. He wants it to be personal.

If I was meeting some high political dignitary that I'd never met before, I wouldn't speak to that individual in personal terms. I would speak in very respectful and probably very formal terms—referring to him or her by their title and being very formal about the way I addressed that person.

But Jesus is reminding us here that God wants our prayer time to be personal. He says begin with Father, *“Our Father...”* We have to remember something: God is just as personal as you are—in fact, more so. God is personal. I mean, just think about the implications of that for a minute. God's personal. And He wants your time with Him to be personal. Intimate is another word for that.

And so we are to address Him as Father and obviously also to see Him in that role—as the ideal Father.

I've talked to many people over the years who have said, I can't call God Father because of the example of my own father and how bad that was. I understand that. I understand that. I also understand that we need to get over things too, and I don't say that in a harsh or uncaring way, but there comes a point where we have to move past our hurts, and we have to move toward the ideal. And God is the ideal Father. He's everything that your father was not, okay?

If you had a very negative father figure in your life, then I just want you to know: God is everything your father was not. But He really deserves the title. He deserves to be called Father because that term is a very personal and very intimate term.

And what it means is: He is concerned like a father would be concerned for his children. He cares about your welfare, and He wants what's best for you. That's what an ideal father does. Human fathers—we fall down on the job on a regular basis. He never does. He truly deserves.

Sue and I were talking just tonight about titles and titles that people deserve and some titles that people don't deserve. God deserves the title of Father. And we are to call Him Father. Jesus told us: call Him Father. Father, I come to You. Right?

You can kind of hear the opposite of that intimacy in the way some people address God, can't you? Even when they're just talking about God—not necessarily talking to Him. When you hear somebody talking about God and they refer to Him as the man upstairs or some kind of dumb thing like that, that's a fairly impersonal term.

When I hear somebody say that—if they're not really joking—then I know that there's no intimacy. They really don't have a personal kind of a relationship with the Lord. It lacks intimacy.

By the same token, if somebody uses a very formal kind of a— their prayer, you know, oh, gracious and magnanimous God of all creation, and then speaks to Him in King James English, it's like, okay, I understand the whole idea of wanting to sound respectful. But when you come, I would hope that when you are in your own personal prayer closet, that's not the way you begin to address Him.

Because that's not intimate. That's not personal. That's formal. It's distant. It's something you would say to a dignitary that you don't know or have never met. This is your Father—your heavenly Father—and you are to address Him in terms of closeness and intimacy.

Sometimes people will say, I don't feel always very close to God. Well, duh. Everybody comes to those places in their life. I think some Christians really struggle. They think that everybody else is on this high level above them, and they're down around the ground, hovering just off the ground—or maybe even below the surface from time to time.

And if you knew—if you just knew where I get—I get a lot of questions from people saying, Is it normal that... and then they'll talk about their lives. And I always write back and go, yeah, that's normal. It's like—you're not—I hate to pop your bubble—but you're not unique. In fact, you're like really, really normal, probably, in whatever you're dealing with related to the Lord. And we all struggle in certain areas, and we can all struggle at times with a personal approach to God or even a sense of intimacy with the Lord.

And I think this is a good time in your prayer to even bring it up. If you're going to start on a personal level or even with personal terms, why not come to Him and say, Father, I struggle calling you that sometimes because I just don't feel like I'm very close to you. I feel like I've just kind of—there's a distance. And I

know that you want to have a personal relationship with me because Jesus told me to call you Father in very intimate and personal terms, but I'm not feeling it right now. So would you help me to have a greater sense of that personal relationship—that intimacy with you—that I know you want to have with me? There's nothing wrong with confessing that sort of a thing before the Lord.

And the next thing we're to say there in verse 9 is, “...*hallowed be Your name.*” I don't use the word hallowed in my regular speech, I just got to tell you. The Greek word translated hallowed—it means to make holy, and that's one of the reasons why the New Living Translation actually renders this, “...*may Your name be kept holy.*” I'm not sure how accurate that is, but this is essentially a prayer for God to manifest His holy name in all the earth.

Lord, may Your name be holy. May Your name—may Your name be lifted up. And then remember: the name of someone is the character of someone. It encompasses their character, their attributes. It is who God is. His name is who He is. It's not just a title or a moniker. It's Him. You're really just saying, may You be glorified and be lifted up as holy.

And this prayer—or this element of what we're to pray—if we really stop and think about it and meditate on it, we find that what we're doing at this point is that we're being forced to focus on the nature and the holiness of God as we approach prayer. As we approach God in prayer, we begin to speak of Him. We begin to speak of His holiness. So we're not talking yet about anything related to you, or anything related to your needs, or what's going on in the world. You're focusing on God: You Holy is Your name.

So often our prayer is just an absolute focus on us—our needs, my needs. I come to God, I don't address Him as Father, I don't speak of His holiness, I don't begin to focus on His nature. I just come right through the door and go, here's what I need.

Jesus wants us, in our prayer, to choose to focus on the person of our heavenly Father first—and His holiness. And people, this isn't just because He's like vain or something and wants you to think of Him before you think of yourself. This puts you in the proper perspective. It puts you in the proper place to begin to deal with all the other issues that come along in life—to make God the focus of your coming. To make Him the focus.

And then, before we get into any of our own needs here, we focus next on the kingdom. Look at verse 10 here, we are to say, “*Your kingdom come..*”

A little later in this chapter—let me show you this on the screen—just a little bit farther down in the chapter, Jesus is going to say,

Matthew 6:32 (ESV)

...seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...

...seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...”

Seek first. Notice that He follows suit with that even in the Lord's Prayer. We have not been talking about any other kingdom or any other issues or any other needs yet. We're coming to the kingdom. We're focusing on the kingdom of God here first.

And so He says the prayer is, “...*Your kingdom come*,...” And it's clear that God wants us to focus on the issues and concerns of His kingdom above the kingdom of man—above the kingdom of this world. And that's difficult, isn't it? It's difficult. Why? Because the kingdom of God doesn't press in on me like the kingdom of the world does.

The kingdom of the world presses in on me because I read the news, or I hear this, or somebody says that. And all these things—and these stresses and concerns and difficulties—they press in on me. And now I'm burdened by them, and I desperately want to go to the Lord and unload them. But as I come into His presence, He goes, let's talk about My Kingdom first.

Do you see the perspective? How, when we come into prayer, the Lord wants us to switch our perspective and change the way we come into prayer? “*Your kingdom come*,...” And that means we're to seek the things related to God and His kingdom as a priority above and beyond the things of the world.

Next, He says we are to say, we are to say, “...*your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*.” And we've already observed that so much of our prayer time is based upon my will and my desires and what I want to see accomplished. And He says, before you get to that, I want you to pray that My will is accomplished. Wow. It's like, Lord, I don't know if I can do this. When do my needs get met? I'm dying over here. You're going to be okay. Get your perspective—get your focus right. “...*your will be done*...”

Jesus challenges us to spend time praying for God's will to be done. And what we're doing here when we say this is we're literally praying for God to bring heaven to earth—the characteristics of heaven to earth. And when you think of it that way, it's pretty cool.

But in my own prayer time, when I come to this—and I actually use the Lord's Prayer to pray—and when I get to this place of “...*your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*.” I begin to think about the things that are going on that I am just aware of. And I just—Lord, need Your will. I need Your will.

And sometimes it's a hard prayer to pray, isn't it? I want Your will to be done. Because sometimes we're not so sure God's will is what we want. In fact, sometimes we're even sure it isn't.

But just tonight I prayed with a family over the phone by the bedside of a fairly young mom who is about to step into eternity. She's had a rare form of leukemia for the last eight years. And for the last year or so, she's been mostly bedridden. And I'm so honored by this, but her husband contacted me and said that she's been just listening to my teachings online, and it has really encouraged and strengthened her heart. And she grew to have such a love for the Word.

And he contacted me and said, would you be willing to pray with our family? And her parents came up. So anyway, they arranged a time, and I called this afternoon—it was actually late this afternoon—and she was there, but she was at a point where she was so heavily medicated they weren't sure what she could hear or not hear.

But we spent time praying for the will of God to be done. And that's really hard when you're about to lose a loved one—somebody who's about to step into eternity—and you don't want them to. She's got two boys, one in ninth grade, one in seventh grade, and they're about to lose their mom. And I say “lose,” and you know what I mean by that. Nobody's lost when they know the Lord. But they're going to miss her. No question about that. So here we are, praying for God's will.

And they even said that. I asked them ahead of time, what do you—what is the greatest need? What do you want me to pray? How do you want me to pray? And he just said, pray for God's will.

And that's hard. That's really hard. But we are to do it. We are to ask for His will to be done. And I got to be honest with you—I think this is one of the greatest things we can ask. If you don't know anything else to pray—people so many times say to me, Pastor, I've got this going on in my life, but I don't know how to pray about it—pray for God's will to be done. If that's all that can come out of your mouth, you've prayed a powerful prayer. Right?

Didn't Jesus model that for us in the Garden of Gethsemane? Lord, if there's any way for this cup to pass from me, but if not, not my will—not according to my will—let Your will be done. (Matthew 26:39) What a powerful prayer of surrender and trust, confidence in the Lord. I think it's a prayer of faith. I think it's one of the greatest prayers of faith.

There was a time in my life when I was a little more influenced by the faith crowd, and I thought praying “...*your will be done*,...” was kind of a cop-out. That was when I was young and stupid. But now I'm old and not quite as stupid,

and I've learned that it's a powerful prayer of surrender. And it's a wonderful thing to pray, Lord, let Your—bring Your will to earth.

Next is verse 11, where we finally get to our own personal needs. Whoa. Finally. Whew. Thought we were going to die here. *"Give us this day our daily bread,..."* And the first thing this petition does is express our dependence on God. It puts us in the proper perspective of recognizing that we are dependent on Him to meet and to provide for our daily needs.

And I believe personally that daily bread goes a whole lot deeper than what we put in our mouths. I think daily bread can be anything that you need for the day—whether your need is courage, or whether your need is peace, or whether your need is joy, or whether your need is wisdom to make a decision, or faith to stand up against a trial. If that's your daily bread, ask Him for it—daily. Daily.

And the point of all of this is that we're expressing in this part of the prayer our complete and total reliance on Him to take care of our daily needs—whatever they may be. And we're reminded again that He knows those needs before we ask Him. So you don't have to launch into a long explanation of why you need it. Just tell Him what you need because He already knows.

I've had people ask me in the past—I bet you have too if you've talked to anybody about the Lord—sometimes people will say, well, if He already knows our needs, why should I even have to ask? Because God wants you to come to Him in faith. He also wants to have a personal relationship with you, and you can't have a personal relationship with somebody you never talk to or you never meet. It's impossible. You can't be personal with someone with whom you're not personal.

So He wants that relationship, but He also wants you to express faith—because He knows that that is a huge part of what it means to put our confidence in the Lord—to say to Him, and it's important to say it, whether you say it verbally or just in your heart, I need You. I need You to take care of this. These are my needs today. This is where my daily bread is needed right now, and I need You to take care of it. That is an expression of faith, and that's an important thing.

And I'll tell you something else it helps with: it's an antidote to worry. When you never get around to telling the Lord what you need and trusting Him with that need, you are going to find that worry is going to build up in your heart—eventually to the place of anxiety.

Let me show you what Paul wrote to the Philippians in chapter 4, beginning at verse 6. He said,

Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV)

do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

do not be anxious about anything(I know, easier said than done), *but in everything* (in other words, in the midst of any issue you may be going through) *by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving* (be careful to add that in there) *let your requests be made known to God.*(And then you have it: the promise.) *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* ”

I know how people love to just quote verse 7 without talking about verse 6. They love to say, hey man, peace of God transcends all understanding, guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus. No, no, no. This is conditional. This promise is conditional. It's conditioned upon praying. Well, it's conditioned upon keeping your heart from worry and then bringing those things to the throne of grace with thanksgiving, laying them before the Lord, and trusting Him. Then there's a promise.

We think sometimes because salvation is free, everything else is free. No. Salvation is free. A lot of the other promises in God's Word are conditional. And this is one of them. It is conditioned upon coming to the Lord and praying and trusting Him. And then the peace of God will guard your hearts and your minds.

Next, verse 12—we come to that place of the need for forgiveness. He says you're to pray, *"...and forgive us our debts* (That's a great word. We'll talk about it here) *as we also have forgiven our debtors.* ”

Now, before we get any further into this, I want to remind you of something. This is not a prayer to be forgiven so you can go to heaven. Okay? We've already dealt with that at the cross. Your sins are forgiven for your eternal salvation—past, present, and future. When you come to Jesus Christ and you put your confidence in His finished work on the cross, that's done. You're no longer praying for forgiveness for salvation. That's finished. The work is finished. You've accepted Jesus. You've put your confidence in His work. That's done.

And I say this because I get this a lot. This messes people up a lot because they read this in verse 12, and they think, boy, I got to... This is where the idea comes from: if you sin and you don't get forgiven, you're going to hell—which is one of the—it's got to be one of the most tormenting thoughts I can imagine

somebody would ponder. That, I believe that Jesus died for me, but I got to keep it alive. It's on me to keep it alive by making sure I confess my sins and I repent just right. Because if I don't repent just right and confess my sins just right, it all goes away.

You think that's an uncommon belief? I have learned otherwise. Yeah. It's very common. And it's very unbiblical.

Listen. When you're saved, you're saved. And you can't sin your way out of the kingdom. Just like my own kids—if they mess up—they can't mess up their way out of the family. They are who they are. And you are who you are. You're a child of God because of your confidence in the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

You're going to mess up along the way. It's not going to affect your eternal salvation, but it will affect your relationship with God. It will get in the way of your relationship with God. This is not a prayer for judicial forgiveness. It's a prayer for relational forgiveness.

So we are told to come before the Lord and say, Lord, please, “...*forgive us our debts.*” And that's an interesting word because I really like that it is referred to here as a debt, because a debt means something that is owed. Right?

And these debts happen when we default on our obligations. My obligation as a believer—and you have the same obligations—our obligations as believers are to live a godly life. Right? Do we always live a godly life? No. That's a debt. Our obligations are to walk with the Lord in joy. Do we always do that? No. Well, then we create a debt when we don't accomplish what we are called to accomplish.

There's all kinds of things we're called to do in our lives with Christ. And when we don't do them, we accrue debts. We're indebted to the Lord—not to be saved, okay, that's already taken care of at the cross—but we are obligated to live our life in Christ to the glory of God. But we don't always do it, and so we accrue debt.

And so we come to the Lord and we say, “...*forgive us our debts...*” I've accrued some debts. In other words, I've defaulted on my loan. It's kind of like that idea. Forgive my default of my obligation, and so forth.

And again, our debts cause a relational separation between us and our heavenly Father, and that separation needs to be dealt with. And it is dealt with when we come to Him and we say, forgive me. Forgive me for my debts.

But you'll notice that this is another thing that's based on a condition. And that's the other way we know this is not about salvation. Did you notice He goes on to say, "...as we also have forgiven our debtors." Those who have accrued debts for us, as we have done this, and so forth.

In other words, there are people who owe me a debt because they've done things, said things, had attitudes, or whatever, that were contrary to God's Word, God's law, so on and so forth—whatever. But the condition of my forgiveness is that I also forgive others.

So you see, if we're talking about salvation—if this is a salvation issue—my salvation is now dependent on my ability to forgive other people. And that's a work. And Paul said in Ephesians 2:8–9 that my salvation is not by works, lest anyone could boast.

You with me? So this is another way we know this is not a salvation issue. This is a relational issue. So He says, as we have also released the debts of others against us, our debts relationally are released by the Lord, right?

So, Pastor Paul, I'm having a hard time with my relationship with God. I just feel so distant. Well, are there people in your life that maybe you haven't released the debt that they owe you? Well, what do you mean? Well, has anybody hurt you that you kind of are maintaining a heart of bitterness toward?

Forgiveness is hard. Yeah, I know. But what? There's a condition to repairing your relationship with your Heavenly Father, and that is to repair your relationship. I'm not—when I say repair your relationship—sometimes you can't do that from the standpoint of having a good relationship, but you can forgive them. You can release the debt. You can say, debt's paid for. Done. Good. Wiped out. You can do that part, even if you can't go on and have a relationship with them, because they're not willing.

When that happens, God says, all right, then our relationship... You see, here's the deal: you can't have a close, intimate relationship with God when you're holding things against other people. You can't. Just can't do it. You can't do it. So if you're trying and you're failing, then now you know why.

And He's going to have more to say about releasing debts here in just a moment. But we come to the final petition in verse 13, which is: "*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*"

I had a guy write me tonight—just tonight—who wanted to know what this all was about because he was kind of confused about it. Because James says that God can't be tempted and God doesn't tempt us. So what's this all about?

Basically, what this is saying—or what we are praying when we say this—is, strengthen me so that I don't give in to temptation. Don't allow me to yield to those things in life that are a temptation to me. Because temptation is a constant. It's a constant. It doesn't go away on this side of heaven. And we're never going to be free from temptation.

But temptation is not a sin. I was having a conversation here a couple weeks ago with a guy who was absolutely convinced that temptation was a sin. I said, well, in that case, Jesus sinned. Because the Bible says He was tempted in all ways like us and was without sin. That's what it goes on to say, right? He was tempted in all ways and was without sin. Tells you right there, temptation is not a sin.

But it is a constant. And it is something that is always on us—to turn and give in to it. But this prayer—and this is an important part of our prayer—is that God might grant us the strength to stand against those temptations and not to fall to them.

And Paul reminds us that God is faithful to do that. Let me show you from... you guys know this. This was my very first Scripture memorization when I became a believer:

1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man, God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man, God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

So what's the word here? The message is: all kinds of temptations are going to come your way. They're all common. But God is faithful. And He will give you the strength to stand up under temptation. In other words, He'll give you what you need for godliness.

Isn't that what it says in the Bible elsewhere? “*He has given us everything we need for life and godliness.*” It's saying the same thing, right? As 1 Corinthians 10:13.

So God is faithful. And this is a good time in your prayer—as you're using this as a model, right? You're not just reciting this mindlessly. You're using this as a model. So you come to this place about temptations and so on and so forth, and you start listing the things that you're vulnerable to:

Lord, in my past, I've shown a vulnerability to this, and this, and this, and this. And I need Your strength to continue to stand in victory against falling to those things. I pray in the name of Jesus that You would give me the strength.

And do that every day. Because we need that strength every single day. Right? Every single day.

And then the last part of this verse is: “...*but deliver us from evil.*” And personally, I think the best translation is “...*from the evil one.*” And this is the point in prayer where we pray against the work of the enemy.

Because even though as believers we can't be invested with a demonic spirit—because we're already invested with the Holy Spirit—the enemy can harass you. He can cause all kinds of troubles. And of course, his goal is to get you to fall and become hopeless.

And so we need to be in prayer: Lord, deliver me from the work of the enemy. This is where spiritual warfare comes into play. And Paul writes about it to the Ephesians. Let me show you from Ephesians chapter 6:

Ephesians 6:10-12 (ESV)

...be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might, Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

“...*be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.* (And he tells us to) *Put on the whole armor ... (that) God...*” has given us to be able to fight that fight—so that we can stand against the schemes of the devil. And he reminds us here: Listen, it's not people. It's not flesh and blood that you're wrestling with. You're wrestling against rulers and authorities and cosmic powers over this present darkness—against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

That's where the real wrestling match is going on. And you've got to be prepared for that. And He has equipped you for it through the full armor. And you have to be praying about it: Lord, deliver me. Deliver me. Deliver me from the evil one. Isn't that an important part of our prayer?

And then Jesus returns to the idea of forgiving others as a condition of His forgiveness. Again, remember: this is relational, not judicial. He says in verse 14: “*For if you forgive others their trespasses* (Now we're talking about trespasses. And what is a trespass? It's where somebody knew what they were

doing, and they did it anyway. So if you forgive others their trespasses,) *your Heavenly Father will also forgive you,* ¹⁵ *but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*”

And again, that means you're going to find yourself at a distance with God—relationally. And there's going to be a distance. You're going to feel a coldness. You're going to feel He's at arm's length. Because that's where you put Him—by not forgiving others when they messed you over.

And so the Lord says, there is a condition for that closeness to be restored, and that is the forgiveness of others. And so He repeats what I believe is a strong message here—and that is that if we're unwilling to forgive others, we just can't expect to stay in close fellowship with the Lord.

You're not going to have intimacy with God if you insist on holding your brother or sister for ransom and demanding from them payment when God forgave you.

So the Lord's Prayer—praying the Lord's Prayer—I want to encourage you, if you're one of those people like me who it helps to have a guideline or a pattern to help you pray, use this. You probably have the Lord's Prayer memorized anyway. So great—speak part of it, and then meditate on it, and pray about what He's talking about—not just what the text says.

Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for the blessing of Your Word. Thank You for the insights we gain concerning prayer.

Lord, we want to have a personal and intimate relationship with You. We want to be close. We want our hearts, Lord God, to yearn for You and to be filled with peace.

But we see, Lord God, that there are some conditional promises in the Word regarding peace, relationship, and that sort of thing. We pray, Lord, that You would help us to stand strong.

Help us to be quick to forgive, quick to love, quick to release, quick to bring things to the throne of grace, and to trust You with our lives.

We fall down on that quite often, but we pray that You'd help us to be more consistent. And we ask it in Jesus' precious name, amen.