

## Matt. 6:5-15

### Intro:

This is the second of three passages (1-4, 5-15, 16-18) which warn against doing good deeds only for the purpose of being seen doing the good deeds, with the motive of receiving public acclamation for doing them. Jesus elaborated three specific examples of this that were prevalent in His time. But the emphasis in all of these is the underlying attitude and purpose for doing them, more than the actual deeds. All of the deeds which Jesus addressed are good things, and should be done.

Jesus's point in these passages is about how and why they are done. They should be done because it is right to do them. They should be done in obedience to God, and for the pleasure and glory of God. The problem which Jesus was addressing is that human pride easily distorts these good deeds into hypocritical measures of piety which are done to puff up the one doing them before their peers, more than to serve God. Deeds which are supposed to glorify God were being used to glorify self. And Jesus strongly warned against doing this by addressing the contrasting rewards one would receive for doing these things rightly, verses doing them selfishly.

However, this passage is different from the other two, in that it contains much additional information about how to pray. Not only does this passage contain the negative warnings against doing good to show off, and instructions how to do good without showing off. But Jesus also taught in depth about how to pray, both negatively and positively. This is probably because prayer is not as straightforward as giving (1-4) and fasting (16-18). Most people already know how to give and fast, and don't need detailed instructions about how to do it. But many people don't know how to pray well. And so, Jesus taught more extensively on the fundamentals of prayer in this passage. He spoke about mistaken ways to pray that were to be avoided. And He also gave a model prayer, which teaches the kind of things we should pray about when we pray.

### I. Don't pray for public acclaim, but to please God (5-6)

This section parallels the surrounding passages (1-4, 16-18) in addressing the motives and attitudes for praying. Prayer is a very good activity. But like everything, it can be twisted into something sinful by our motives and attitude. We are not to pray in order to be seen by others and thought well of. We are not to use prayer as a means for trying to make ourselves look righteous and spiritual. We are to pray before God, and for His notice and blessing.

#### A. Neg: Don't pray for the sake of public acclaim (5)

##### 1. Praying like the hypocrites – for the sake of publicity – is not pleasing to God (5a-g)

###### a. Be careful not to pray for the sake of publicity and image (5a-c)

###### 1) When you pray (5a)

Prayer is the activity of speaking to God, either out loud or silently. It is the means for communicating with God, making our needs and requests known, and also for confessing our sins and expressing our worship and gratitude, among other things. Jesus assumed that His disciples would pray regularly, and addressed these instructions for those times when we pray. He did not specify or suggest how often we should pray, but Jesus modeled setting aside specific times daily for prayer. And, in another sense, the New Testament teaches that we should constantly be in an attitude of prayer throughout the day (see 1 Thes. 5:17).

###### 2) Don't pray for public acclamation, like hypocrites (5b-c)

###### a) Do not be (5b)

This proposition is closely connected with the following one. Jesus was commanding His disciples not to be a certain way, which is further defined by the comparison in the next proposition. There are characteristics and habits and attitudes that are not to be a part of His disciples' lives, which He will define by comparison.

b) Like the hypocrites [are] (5c)

This is the completion of the thought began in the previous proposition. Jesus's disciples are not to be like the hypocrites. "Hypocrites" are people who pretend to be something they are not. It is play acting and deception that does not match reality. We are not to fake it when we pray. We are not to have the attitudes and habits they have, as will be elaborated in the following propositions. And we should pray with different goals and manners, as Jesus will also teach later in this passage.

b. Reason: Because they pray for the sake of publicity and glory (5d-g)

In this section, Jesus gave the reason why not to be like the hypocrites. Because their motivation and goal for praying in the way that they do is an ungodly motivation which is ultimately unrewarding. Jesus told what their motivation was and then described the purpose behind it.

1) Because they love to pray in front of others (5d-f)

This is the motive for the hypocrites praying in the way that they do. They love their hypocrisy and the accolades it gains them.

a) Because they love (5d)

This proposition goes with the following ones to give a complete idea. This one introduces the thought by stating that they love to do something which will be described in the following propositions. They are motivated by what they love to do. In fact, everyone is motivated by what they love, by their affections. So, it is important to cultivate godly affections, so as to have godly motivations, so as to have godly actions. That is why Jesus consistently throughout the Sermon on the Mount concentrated not only on the outward actions, but on the inward affections and motivations. But here He said that the hypocrites love something which is not godly, but rather selfish and prideful, as described in the following propositions.

b) To pray in prominent public places (5e-f)

This section elaborates on what the hypocrites love to do. They love to pray. But this is qualified in a way that makes the typically good activity of prayer to be something ungodly. The first proposition describes the manner in which they love to pray. And later (5g), Jesus will tell the purpose for which they pray. As stated earlier, praying is a good thing, and loving to pray is even better. But what makes the hypocrites to be hypocrites is that they love to pray in a selfish, prideful manner for selfish, prideful purposes. The manner in which they pray comes first in this section (5e) for emphasis, and then the main idea of them praying (5f) follows.

(1) While standing in the synagogues and on the corners of streets (5e)

This proposition describes the manner in which the hypocrites love to pray. They love to pray in public places in order to be seen. Their love is not in praying, but their love is in being seen. Their love is in other people noticing them and thinking them to be righteous and spiritual. And therefore, they love to pray standing in the synagogue (the place of religious observance) and on the corners of streets (where people would congregate, or where there would be significant foot traffic, and therefore larger amounts of people). Their praying is purposefully done in conspicuous places so that their praying would be conspicuous, for the purpose described in 5g.

(2) To pray (5f)

This is the main idea of what the hypocrites love to do. But this idea needs to be connected with the proposition before, which tells the manner in which they love to pray, and the following proposition, which tells the purpose for which they pray. Again, prayer is a good thing. But by their ungodly motive and purpose, they turn it into an ungodly thing. And this is exactly the motivation and purpose which Jesus was warning His hearers to avoid.

2) Purpose: in order that they may appear to the people [to be pious] (5g)

This proposition marks the purpose why the hypocrites prayed in a public place. The main emphasis in this proposition is on the phrase “to the people.” They do it to be seen. They do it to draw attention to themselves, just like the people announcing their giving with trumpets in the street (see v. 2). They want to be visible – to receive people’s attention. They value what people think about them, and desire and work toward enhancing the perception they have in the eyes of others. Their prayers were not intended to be heard by God as much as they were intended to be seen by people. This shows that their motivation and intention was not to connect with God and please God, as much as it was to impress the people around them with their prayer as a demonstration of their own piety. This is the exact motivation and attitude which Jesus was warning against.

2. I emphasize that this is all the reward they will get (5h-i)

This section is exactly the same as 2e-f in the previous passage and 16f-g in the following passage. This is because Jesus was making the exact same point in all three of these passages, just applying it to different acts of righteousness. In those passages, He applied it to charity giving and fasting. Here He applied it to prayer.

a. I am saying to you truly (5h)

This proposition is an introductory statement, introducing what Jesus was about to say in the next proposition. Jesus often used this formula (see v. 2, 16, 5:18), including the word “truly” to emphasize, not only the truth of what He was about to say, but also its importance. This was a prompter of attention, signaling to His hearers that they should pay particularly close attention to what He was about to say.

b. They have fully received their reward (5i)

In this proposition, Jesus stressed that the fleeting glory and pride which they would receive from people witnessing their prayer and being impressed with their piety, was the only reward they would receive for it. This is in direct contrast to the reward they would have received from God (mentioned in 6e) if they would have genuinely prayed with the proper attitude and motivation. Their reward is nothing compared to the reward they missed out on. Their momentary rise of reputation before people is worthless. It will do no good in the long run. It is nothing compared to the reality of genuine character, genuine prayer, and our standing in God’s opinion, which is the only opinion that truly matters. Reward from God is eternal, and vainglory before people is worthless.

B. Pos: Pray to please God (6)

Just like in the previous passage, Jesus did not just warn them against praying with the wrong motivation and attitude. He also taught how to pray with the correct motivation and attitude, and in a manner that will protect against the dangers of taking selfish pride in doing good things.

1. Pray to your Father in secret (6a-d)

a. When you pray (6a)

This proposition is the exact same wording as 5a. This demonstrates the parallel structure of these two verses. Verse 5 tells what *not* to do “when you pray.” And verse 6 (and following) tells what we *should* do “when you pray.”

b. Pray to your Father in secret, away from observation (6b-d)

Just like in v. 3 and v. 17, Jesus countered the dangerous motivation of doing good works only in order for people to see and be impressed with us, by suggesting a manner of doing those good works which protects (as much as possible) from people observing them, and so protecting from the pride that might result from being seen. The problem is not in being seen doing good works, but in the pride that would result. So, the solution is not to legalistically refuse to do good works when people may see, but to cultivate an attitude and practice of humility and secrecy (as much as reasonable) to protect oneself from this kind of pride. Note that there is also a temptation to spiritual pride in your own secrecy and humility. We need to guard against this attitude as well. As C. S. Lewis once wrote, “humility is not thinking too much of yourself. Neither is it thinking too little of yourself. It is not thinking of yourself at all.”

1) Go into your inner room (6b)

An “inner room” is a room in a house without windows. The focus is not so much on going to a particular place, but on the privacy of this place, where people cannot see what you are doing. The purpose is to avoid the temptation of praying just to be seen. And this has the added bonus of minimizing distractions to prayer because of the privacy.

2) Pray to your Father in a private place (6c-d)

a) Locking your door (6c)

This proposition continues the instructions for finding a private place for prayer without the possibility of being seen doing good works. The reason for this is not because we are in any way ashamed of our prayers, or the fact that we pray. And the reason is not to be undisturbed when we pray, although that is an added benefit. The reason in the larger passage is to pray unhindered by the thought of what other people think about us, so that our prayers would be concentrating on God, rather than on how we look before people.

b) Pray to your Father, Who is in Heaven (6d)

As usual, Jesus gave the better alternative to something that is a sin (or a dangerous temptation to sin). We can avoid the sin of pridefully caring what others think of our praying by caring what God thinks about our praying. We should avoid praying before people by praying before God alone. We are to pray exclusively to our Father Who is in Heaven. And we should have this same kind of attitude, even when we pray in public settings. Group and corporate prayer is a good and beneficial practice, when done in addition to private personal prayer. But it should be done with the same devotional attitude toward God, and not in order to show off before other people.

Jesus described God, to Whom we are to pray, as our “Father.” We have an intimate familial relationship with God that is demonstrated by His making Himself available to us in prayer. And He cares for, protects, and provides for us, which can all be accessed through prayer. And we are being changed into His family likeness more and more, which also happens partly through prayer.

But Jesus also described Him as our “Father, *Who is in Heaven.*” That is, He is the Holy, Sovereign Lord of all the Universe. He is infinitely powerful and completely able to answer any prayer with good things (see 7:11). He is able to satisfy any longings we try to satisfy by puffing up our ego by doing good works before people. He is better able to satisfy them than we could in any other way, because all our longings were created to be ultimately satisfied only by Him. And so, we should go to Him, in secret whenever possible. But we should also go to Him in public if secrecy is not possible, because the primacy of going to God for intimate familial and dependent relationship is the entire point of prayer, and the best antidote to the abuse of prayer.

2. And your Father, Who is seeing in secret, will recompense/reward you (6e)

This proposition is exactly the same wording as 4b (on charity giving) and almost exactly the same wording as 18c (on fasting). It gives the ultimate motivation for praying in the proper manner – not for human recognition, but to please and connect with God, our Father. We are to pray privately, because God, Who knows what we do even in private will see and reward us. We are to assume that the reward we will receive from the infinite God will be infinitely better than any puny, momentary benefit we could receive from impressing others by praying in public. Therefore, we are to delight in God and His benefits, which we will receive for praying rightly (and by connecting with God in prayer), and let that be our primary motivation to pray in a way that is pleasing to Him, and to avoid the danger of pride that Jesus was warning against in this passage.

II. Don't pray with unthoughtful, superfluous babbling (7-8)

In this section, Jesus gave a second warning against another possible hindrance in prayer. This problem is saying an abundance of words without actually saying anything. And this problem stems from a mistaken understanding of God and of the purpose of prayer. Jesus both pointed out the nature of the problem, and gave the solution. He taught the proper way to pray, which avoids this problem, and gave the theological reason why.

A. The Gentiles' bad example of babbling prayer (7)

1. Don't follow the Gentiles' example of unthoughtful formulaic prayers (7a-c)

a. When praying (7a)

This proposition is similar to 5a and 6a, but is in a different grammatical form. The word "when" is not stated, but rather implied. And the form of the word "praying" shows it to be a subordinate idea, just restated in order to focus on the more primary ideas in 7b-c. This proposition is not the focus of this section, but just a reminder of prayer in order to concentrate on the way *not* to pray, as communicated in the following propositions.

b. Don't spew an abundance of unthoughtful formulaic words, like Gentiles (7b-c)

1) Do not speak an abundance of unthoughtful, meaningless words (7b)

This phrase is a translation of just two words: One word is the negative, translated "not." And the other word means to babble or stammer, and communicates the idea of using a lot of words, often using the same words again and again. Jesus was communicating the idea of speaking a lot without really thinking – using a lot of meaningless words.

Some people, because they have not yet learned to pray well, repeat the words "Jesus" or "God" or similar phrases a lot in their prayers. This is a bad habit, which should be corrected. But this probably not a violation of this command, because it was not what Jesus was talking about. In order to understand this prohibition, we must understand the following propositions, where Jesus explained what He was forbidding and why.

2) As the Gentiles [do] (7c)

This proposition is the first statement clarifying and explaining what Jesus was talking about when He warned against praying with an abundance of unthoughtful, meaningless words. His example of what not to do was the Gentiles. Gentiles are all the people who are not Jewish. The primary difference highlighted when this term was used was that they did not worship the God of the Jews – the One True God. They did not pray rightly, and the defect in their prayers had something to do with the fact that they did not pray to the true God. They had a mistaken view of God, which hindered their prayers in a way which Jesus will explain in the following propositions.

2. Because they think that abundance of words is helpful (7d-e)

This section gives the reason why not to pray as the Gentiles do. It explains what is deficient with their manner of prayer, which is based on their deficient understanding of Who God is, and how He interacts with His children. Their mindset and deficient opinion about God caused them to pray in a way that is deficient.

a. For they suppose (7d)

The reason they pray in the way they do is because of their mistaken belief about God (or the gods they think they are praying to). They have a theological understanding which they believe to be true about the gods, which drives their practice of prayer. But Jesus pointed out that their belief system is wrong, and therefore, they pray in the wrong way – with an abundance of thoughtless words. The next proposition tells exactly what they thought about God and prayer, and how it was wrong.

b. That they will be listened to because of the length of their speech (7e)

This proposition is the content of what Gentiles think about prayer, based on what they think about their gods, as introduced in the previous proposition. They think that they will be heard by God (or their gods) because they speak with an abundance of words. They suppose that the more they speak in prayer, the more they will be heard and answered. This is based on the underlying assumption that somehow their prayers hold power over their gods.

This could mean they were thinking in the sense of a magic formula – that if they say the right words (like “abracadabra”), or the right amount of words, their gods will somehow be compelled to answer by the force of their words and/or their abundance. Or their thought process could be in the sense of gaining the attention of the gods by speaking more abundantly – along the lines of the one who speaks the loudest gets heard (the squeaky wheel gets the grease). Or they could think in the sense that they would somehow earn the attention of the gods by their extra effort of praying extensively – they would somehow prove their merit to be answered by praying with more effort, as if they were being paid by the word count. Or they could think in the sense that the amount of prayer could somehow serve or benefit the gods – that the more words used, the more benefit the gods would receive from our prayer, as if the amount of prayer was somehow connected to the amount of honor or empowerment the gods would receive.

All of these possibilities are because of the Gentiles’ understanding of their pagan gods and how they could be manipulated and influenced. They thought their gods were somehow needy and/or impressed with their prayers. They thought their prayers had an inherent influence over their gods because their gods were somehow subject to whatever influence their prayers, including their length, would have. None of these things is true of our relationship with the True God in prayer, as Jesus will clarify in the following verse.

B. Don’t follow their unprofitable example (8)

1. Therefore, do not be like them (8a)

Jesus’s obvious conclusion to pointing out the deficiencies in the Gentiles’ theology and practice of prayer was not to follow their example. Their understanding of prayer is wrong, so think differently. Their practice of prayer is deficient, so don’t do it. He warned against having their mindset and praying in their manner for the reasons given in the following propositions.

2. Reason: Superfluous words are not necessary or helpful (8b-c)

These closely connected propositions are the reason Jesus gave for His hearers not to pray like the Gentiles. Jesus rejected their approach to prayer because it was the effect of bad theology – incorrect understanding about Who God is and how He interacts with His people. And here Jesus connected the way His people should pray with an accurate understanding of God and how He relates to His people. He corrected the theology and thereby (implicitly) taught how to pray properly, which He will explicitly cover later in this passage.

In this verse, Jesus reminded His hearers that God is not manipulatable. God is not like the pagan gods that can be controlled and bribed with prayers and favors. God’s arm cannot be twisted by our prayers to do something that He, in His infinite wisdom is not already inclined to do. Our prayers are not so that God can get information or insight or motivation which He does not already have. Our prayers are not to supply something that God is lacking or fill some need which God has. God is not needy or impressed with our

supposed contribution to His ability by our prayers. God is all-knowing, and so He has no need for us to give Him advice or reminder through prayer.

And that brings up an obvious question: “If God already knows what we need, and (at least in some sense) is already committed to the wisest course of action, then why should we pray? What difference do our prayers really make?” Part of the answer to that question is hidden in the mystery of the interaction between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. God is fully in control of everything that happens. And yet, He has also designed the world so that human actions are genuinely significant, and make a real difference under the umbrella of His sovereignty. God has ordered the universe in such a way that things are genuinely accomplished by our prayers, and He has included our prayers in His design to accomplish these things. And we are responsible to pray and held accountable for how we pray. The Bible clearly commands prayer and teaches that it matters and accomplishes things, while still leaving God in charge of how and when He answers our prayers (including saying “No” to some prayers).

And therefore, another part of the reason why we pray is better explained by its benefit to us rather than its benefit to God. He delights to include us in His life and working through inviting us to communicate with Him in prayer. He does not need our input, but desires to bless us by making us a part of what He does. It is analogous to a parent letting their child help with whatever chore they are doing. The child (at least at first) is more of a distraction than a help, but the parent involves them for the child’s benefit and for the loving interaction with the child. For further exploration of this question, I recommend “Prayer and the Sovereignty of God” by Bruce Ware, in For the Fame of God’s Name, edited by Sam Storms and Justin Taylor (Crossway, 2010).

Therefore, rote, unthinking prayers are unhelpful. They fall into the mistake of the Gentiles by thinking that we accomplish something just by rattling off some magic formula without really connecting with God. If we just go through the motions with our mouths, reciting some memorized or read prayer, it does no more good than reading a warranty document, unless we mentally, emotionally, and spiritually engage with what we are saying and Who we are speaking with. But there is a constant danger of praying like the pagan Gentiles, when we think we must say our prayers to earn God’s favor, or protect ourselves from harm. God knows what endangers us better than we do. So, if we think of prayers like some talisman for our protection, we are praying no better than pagan Gentiles. And so, Jesus, in this section warned against this kind of theology about prayer, and these kinds of practices in prayer. Therefore, we should not pray with unthoughtful babble, thinking that the large quantity of our words is somehow virtuous. In the next verses, He will spell out the implications for the proper way to pray, including His model prayer for us to follow.

a. **For your Father knows a need which you have (8b)**

God is all knowing, and He knows our needs. Notice that Jesus used the word “needs” and not “wants” or “desires.” Of course, God knows these as well. But the focus in prayer should be on what we genuinely need, and on those things that are truly good for us in God’s estimation. Therefore, prayer is not just like reading a Christmas list to Santa, telling Him what we want. Prayer may include our requests, but it should be much more than that. To only use prayer to try to get what we want is to pray with the same attitude as the pagan Gentiles.

b. **Before you ask Him (8c)**

And God already knows all our needs long before we ask Him. This means that our prayers are not somehow initiating or motivating God’s action. Our prayers don’t change God’s mind as much as they tap into God’s mind – His already existing knowledge, wisdom, and gracious character.

### III. How to pray (9-15)

The previous two larger sections of this passage concentrated primarily on how *not* to pray. For the rest of this passage, Jesus concentrated on how we *should* pray. This section is a positive example given in a model prayer, and then an elaboration on one portions of this model prayer, giving the reason why we should pray in this way.

#### A. A Model prayer (9-13)

This section, which is traditionally called “the Lord’s prayer,” is a model of how we should pray. It is the positive alternative to the negative dangers Jesus warned against in the previous sections. This is a model for prayer and not primarily a set prayer to recite. It is not wrong to recite this prayer as it is written. But it is wrong to recite this prayer as written *without thought*. If we just rattle off this prayer from memory as a mere formality, or as a substitute for thoughtful engagement with God, we would be guilty of unthoughtful, superfluous babbling, which Jesus was forbidding in the previous section. This prayer is not given for rote repetition. If we thoughtfully pray this prayer in the form in which it is written – understanding, agreeing with, and heartfully expressing what it says – then it can be beneficial. But quoting this prayer as written is not what Jesus intended it to be used for. Rather, this is a framework, an outline and example of the kind of things we should pray about in our heartfelt prayers. It tells us important topics and expressions and petitions we should be using in addressing God. And it shows a very helpful order and development of our thoughts as we communicate with God in prayer. It is like a roadmap for prayer. It is also like training wheels for prayer. It gives us a track to ride on as we learn to pray and express the kind of things to God which are in line with His character and will. And this model prayer tells us a lot about Who God is and His priorities for the world and our individual lives, in which He invites us to participate with Him through our prayers.

##### 1. Therefore, you, pray in this way (9a)

In this proposition, Jesus introduced the positive manner in which His disciples should pray. The word “you” is emphatic in this proposition, as a contrast to the pagan Gentiles mentioned in the previous section. Jesus was saying, “in contrast with the Gentiles, who prayed wrongly, YOU are to pray rightly, in this way.” And the word translated “in this way” points to what follows in this passage. We are to pray according to the model Jesus was about to give. If Jesus had wanted us to use the Lord’s Prayer as a set prayer for rote recital, He could have said something like “pray these words.” But He used the more general “in this way” to indicate that this is a looser pattern and model for our prayers.

##### 2. The Lord’s Prayer (9b-13)

This section is the content of the model prayer itself, which Jesus taught His disciples. It begins with how to address God, which teaches about the relational dynamic we have with Him, as exhibited in our prayers. And then the rest is a series of petitions modeling the kind of things we should ask from God, based on His revealed priorities, promises, and plans for our lives, as well as our needs.

###### a. Personal address: Our Father, the One in Heaven (9b)

This proposition is the way Jesus taught us to address God in prayer. There are two parts to this address. First, God is our Father. And second, God is the One in the heavens. With these two phrases, Jesus taught the immanence of God – that He is intimately present with us – and also the transcendence of God – that He is high above creation, and greater than all creation. Both are true. And both matter for how we come to God in prayer.

Jesus taught us to approach God as our Father. He has made Himself available to us in an intimate, protecting, providing, leading relationship. God is to us all that we desired from our earthly fathers, and so much more. The ideal of fatherhood comes from God Himself (see Eph. 3:15). And He is the One we should go to with all our issues, needs, and desires, because He genuinely cares for us and every part of our lives (see 1 Pet. 5:7). And we have open access to God (through Christ) as a part of His family (if we are genuine disciples). He is not related to us as an overlord whom we have to approach through channels of hierarchy or bureaucracy. God is our Father, Whom we can approach freely, and with confidence He will hear us and answer us.

But God is also our Father, Who is in the Heavens. In other words, He is infinitely greater than any human father. He is the Father Who is in sovereign control over the entire universe, Who sits as Lord over all. He is not a part of creation, but is over creation as transcendent creator. He is not in time and space, but over time and space. Even though He is intimately present in time and space, He is in no way limited or contained in time or space. And He is omnipotent. He is infinitely powerful and able to do anything that He, in His infinite wisdom, decides to do. So, there is no limit to His ability to answer our prayers in the best way possible. In prayer, we address the only Sovereign Lord of the universe. And so, our prayers must have an attitude of submission and reverence, as well as a confidence that He is powerful to act.

b. Model petitions to pray: (9c-13)

This section is a model of the kind of requests we can and should make to our Heavenly Father. It is helpful to notice that Jesus modeled this prayer on the promises God gave to His people in Ezekiel chapter 36. Each petition in this prayer, as well as their order and progression, echoes something God promised to do in restoring His people from their exile and bringing them back to the full blessings as His people. The promises of Ezekiel 36 were given to the nation of Israel as they were in captivity in Babylon, but looked forward to the time when they would return to the promised land, and be restored to the blessings they had known earlier in history. And part of that chapter was a description of some of the blessings of being God's people which would be restored. The petitions of the Lord's prayer line up with the promises of restoration in Ezekiel. For example:

Ezek. 36:23 – "I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations" = Matt. 6:9 "Let Your Name be revered as holy." / "Hallowed by Your Name."

Ezek. 36:27 – "I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." = Matt. 6:10 "Let Your Kingdom come. Let your will come to pass also upon Earth, as in Heaven."

Ezek. 36:29 – "...I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you." = Matt. 6:11 "Give us today our necessary food."

Ezek. 36:31 – "They you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices." = Matt. 6:12-13 "And forgive us the guilt of our sins, as we also have forgiven those in debt of guilt to us. Do not bring us into temptation, but rescue us from evil."

Therefore, the petitions of the Lord's prayer can be seen as requests that God would fulfill His promises and complete the restoration of His people to the fulness of blessings which He has planned and promised. Our prayers are ideally a participation in the fulfillment of God's good, eternal purposes. This prayer contains seven formal petitions. The last two are typically recognized as two parts of the same petition, for a total of six actual petitions in this prayer. In this outline, I have combined the second and third to show how closely they are related. However, they are still two separate petitions in this prayer. Jesus taught His people to pray six general categories of requests, which can be expanded as appropriate for personal circumstances and current needs.

It is noteworthy that the first three of the six petitions are God-focused, and only the last three are self-focused. This is very important to recognize if we are to learn to pray well. Prayer first helps us to get out of a self-centered mindset and draws our attention to God and His glory, and His concerns before our own. Our own concerns are still included as important, but they are secondary to God's glory and His concerns. God indeed cares for us and all of our concerns (1 Pet. 5:7). Yet He has a higher concern for His own Name and glory (Isa. 43:7, 48:11). And our prayers should reflect this priority, and train us to put this concern first as well. When we see our world from a God-centered perspective, and pray in that way, we are more realistic, and therefore, more sober and successful in our prayers, and in our lives.

## 1) Let Your Name be revered as holy (9c)

The first petition is for God's Name to be revered as holy. This petition is first for a reason. The Old Testament consistently says that God does things for His own glory and the glory of His Name (see, for example, Psa. 115:1, Isa 43:7). And in Ezekiel chapter 36, God said that He would do all the things He promised "for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone" (Ezek. 36:22). And we see that God is constantly worshipped as "holy" in the heavenly throne room (see Isa. 6:3 and Rev. 4:8). God is Holy, and one of His highest goals is for all the universe to recognize and acknowledge His holiness. So, a petition for this to happen is first in the model prayer Jesus gave.

All of the petitions of verses 9-10 have a grammatical form that does not occur in English. These are all imperatives, but in the third person. What this means is that they are commands or requests, but they are not focused directly to the person being asked, but focused on someone or something else. In English, this would take the form of "I want [this person, or this thing] to do [whatever is commanded]." But this is not addressed directly to the other person or thing, but to the one being spoken to. So, these are often translated something like "Let [so and so] do [something]" or "May [so and so] do [something]." Ultimately, the request is for the one being addressed somehow to work or influence so that the person or thing is caused to do whatever is commanded or requested. In this case, the request is asking God, but the focus is on the desire for His Name to be hallowed. And this particular imperative is also passive, which means the request is not for the Name to do something, but for something to happen to the Name. So, in this petition, Jesus modeled a request that God would somehow work to cause His Name to be revered as holy. And again, some of the ways that God would work to do this are described in Ezekiel chapter 36 and mentioned in the following petitions.

This petition is a request that God's Name would be "hallowed." This word means to be thought of and treated as holy (because it actually is holy). It is related to the words translated "holy" and "sanctify." To be holy is something that only God is in the ultimate sense. It means to be separate and different – to be in a class by yourself. And it then has the connotation of perfection, especially moral perfection. And therefore, for God's Name to be regarded as holy means that God would genuinely be revered and honored as the only God – the God Who is like no other. It is a request that we would be in tremendous awe of God and all that He is. The first petition in the Lord's prayer is that God would be honored, revered, and worshipped as the Holy God Whom He is – that we all would think of and treat God in the way that He genuinely deserves.

This is the opposite of His Name being "profaned" or thought to be common. This is not just the opposite of God's Name being used as a swear word. It is the opposite of God's Name being ignored, and the attitude that God is not relevant to life. Many people in our culture do not think of God or do not think that He is involved in any way in the things we do every day. He is not brought into consideration, or He is mocked as a fantasy or relic of superstition from a pre-scientific age. But none of those things are true. And if we are honest, on some occasions, this is how we treat God (or more accurately, how we ignore God). And this prayer is that all people (including us) would consider God first in all that we do, and acknowledge His intimate involvement in our world. He is real, and He is present, and He is relevant. In fact, He is the most important thing in the entire universe, and the most important part of every aspect of our life. And we should revere God, and live all of life with awe recognizing His involvement in it, and working for His glory in all that we do. And we should pray that all others would do the same.

May His Name be honored as Holy, because He is holy. This is the first petition that Jesus taught us to pray. And this request is an umbrella concept that covers all the other petitions in this model prayer, because all these other petitions will somehow contribute to God's glory and this world's acknowledgement of His holiness. And the glory of God is the ultimate purpose of all creation.

## 2) Let Your Kingdom purposes take place (10)

This section contains two main petitions, which are closely related: “Let Your Kingdom come,” and “Let Your will be done.” These are two separate petitions, but say roughly the same thing in two different ways. Therefore, they are mutually defining. When God’s Kingdom will come, His will and purpose will be accomplished, and when His will is done on earth, as it is in heaven, that is what it will look like when His Kingdom comes.

### a) Let Your Kingdom come (10a)

This proposition has the same grammatical form as 9c, where there is a request directed to God but focused on something else, in this case “His Kingdom.” And the petition is that His Kingdom “come,” as in arrive/take place. This is the same word that is used when someone comes from a different place, or when a time comes, as in “my birthday is coming next week.” So, this is a petition for God Kingdom to arrive in a way that is undefined in this proposition, but assumed in the larger culture of the New Testament. Jesus and John the Baptist had already announced that the Kingdom had drawn near (see 3:2, 4:17). And throughout His ministry, Jesus proved the presence of the Kingdom through His miracles and preaching. But there was also a promise that God’s Kingdom would arrive in a full consummation in a way that had not yet been experienced. And this is what Jesus taught His disciples to pray for.

God’s Kingdom is the full and manifest rule of God on the Earth. Of course, in some sense, God has always ruled as King over the entire universe. But in another sense, His rule has been challenged and rebelled against by His sinful creatures. And God, in His forbearance, has not yet fully manifested His rule, in order to bring us to repentance. But He has promised and predicted throughout the Old Testament that He would completely, manifestly demonstrate His complete rule in a way that He had not yet done – righting every wrong and bringing the fullness of restoration, perfection, and blessing to His creation. This was partly manifested in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ, Who now rules with all authority in Heaven and on Earth (see 28:18). But there are still areas of rebellion which (in His mercy and patience) He has not yet crushed. And the devil is still exercising some influence, though limited.

So, we now live in this tension, where God’s Kingdom has already arrived, and is partially experienced by those who trust in Christ and live as His disciples. But there is also a future hope of the time when the devil’s kingdom will be fully destroyed and the totality of God’s Kingdom blessings will be revealed for His people. And every rebellious earthly Kingdom will submit to the Lordship of Christ. God is already King. But we are to pray that His rule be completely manifested in this world. And this is partly illustrated in the next proposition. When God’s Kingdom fully comes, His will – what He wants to happen – will be completely done on earth, as it is already done in Heaven.

This is a foundational petition that Jesus was modeling for His disciples to pray. All of the other petitions of this model prayer are in some way an elaboration and specific facets of this petition. This not only means that His disciples should pray for the full manifestation of God’s rule on the Earth in general, and in our individual and corporate lives in particular. But we should also desire for this to happen. We should long for the consummation of God’s rule and live in anticipation of it by praying and working toward it, as well as submitting to God’s rule with heartfelt obedience in every area of our lives. We pray for God’s Kingdom to fully come, but we also are to live in light of the fact that His Kingdom has already partially come in Jesus and His rule over His people, including us.

b) **Let Your will be done (10b-c)**

This section is one complete petition made in two separate propositions. The first proposition is the main petition, and the second is a comparison to more clearly define what is meant by the petition in the first proposition. As mentioned above, this petition is closely connected with the previous petition, and they mutually define and explain each other.

(1) **Let Your will come to pass also upon Earth (10b)**

This proposition has the same grammatical form as 9c and 10a, where there is a request directed to God but focused on something else, in this case His “will”. God’s will is all that God wants to happen. It is His purpose and plan. His will is revealed in all the moral commands and prohibitions revealed throughout the Bible. This is shown in such things as the Ten Commandments, but it not limited to just the “Law” portions of the Bible. And His will is not primarily negative, such as “You shall not murder.” The negative prohibitions are just expressions of His positive will, in this case (“Don’t murder”), that we should delight in the sanctity of life, protect life, and promote its thriving. Jesus summarized God’s will for human activity by quoting “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, and all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself.” And God’s will also includes all of His promises and plans to bring all of human history to consummation.

And this petition is for God’s will to be done. This means that God’s purposes will be fulfilled – they will “happen;” they will take place. In one sense, everything that happens, happens because God has chosen at least to allow it to happen. But here Jesus highlighted God’s revealed will for human history as well as His ultimate will to bring the universe to its intended consummation, where He will place all His enemies under His feet, and reign over His creation in unstained blessedness forever (see 1 Cor. 15:24-28, Rev. 19:11-22:6). And Jesus included the phrase “on Earth” to clarify the place where God’s will should be done. This is where we want His will to take place – in our lives and societies. This is not just a pie in the sky wish for the sweet by and by. But it is a realistic looking forward to what we can already experience in part, and what will eventually take place in its fullness in this realm. And this phrase is also a setup for the comparison that will be made in the next proposition.

(2) **As [it is done] in Heaven (10c)**

This proposition is a comparison, completing the thought begun in 10b. The petition for God’s will to be done on earth is clarified by the comparison with the way God’s will is already being done in Heaven. What is experienced in Heaven currently is what we are to pray to experience on Earth. Not only is God’s will being done completely in Heaven – there is no rebellion, sin, evil, or pain in Heaven because God rules absolutely over that blessed realm. But also, God’s will is being done voluntarily and wholeheartedly in Heaven. The current residents of that realm are not obeying God grudgingly, only out of a sense of duty, or fear of punishment. The heavenly beings are all serving God delightedly with reverence and worship, fully loving what God wants to be done, and therefore, doing it with their whole heart. This is the kind of attitude and activity we should pray to take place in our world. The Earth will indeed be this way after the consummation at the second coming of Christ. And we should intensely look forward to that day. But we should also pray and strive for this kind of delighted, heartfelt obedience to God’s will to take place in our own lives, families, jobs, and communities, as much as possible in this age.

3) Give to us today our necessary food (11)

This proposition is in the form of a simple imperative, not the same grammar as the previous petitions. In it, Jesus taught His disciples to request their daily sustenance from God, Who is our ultimate provider. God requires humans to work to grow, procure, or somehow earn their food. But He is the One Who ultimately provides the growth of the plants, the existence of the animals for meat, and/or the opportunity to work in order to earn food. And therefore, we should acknowledge our dependence on Him, and request our daily needs from Him.

The term Jesus used was “bread.” But this word stands for any kind of nourishment. Bread made from grains was the staple food in the promised land, just as rice or yams are the staple in other parts of the world. It was the basic food that sustained life, and this is what is being requested in this petition. God often provides much more than just the bare staple of nutrition in His generosity. But this request is simply for the basic necessity of nourishment and provision to sustain the disciple’s life for another day.

And this request is for God to provide “today.” It is assumed that this prayer would be prayed every day because we have need of provision every day. This does not rule out the possibility that we might somehow obtain a week’s worth of food (or more) at one time. But it acknowledges that each day we are ultimately dependent on God for the necessary provision we have received.

And that is why Jesus taught us to pray for our “daily” bread. The word translated “daily” is not related to the word for “day” or the word “today” used in this proposition. It is sometimes translated “daily” because of its connection in this context with the petition to provide the food “today.” But the basic meaning of this word is closer to “necessary.” This request is asking for that which is needed. And only in the context of asking for what is needed for each particular day does it take on the connotation of “daily.” Again, this is a prayer for the necessary staple, for provision of what is needed for the continuation and sustenance of life. But God will often provide a banquet far beyond the bare necessity for life. However, this prayer is a humble request only for what is necessary, and an acknowledgement of God’s gracious provision of what we receive, whether that is an abundance, or only the bare minimum each day.

God knows our daily needs, not just for food, but for all other kinds of things (see v. 8, 25-34). And this petition is a model for us to request all of these things from God, believing that He is a good Father, Who delights in providing for our needs, and even for our desires in a way that is better than the best of human fathers could provide (see 7:9-10). And therefore, we should make our requests to Him in dependence, but also in assurance that He will provide.

4) Forgive our sins, as we forgive (12)

This verse is a petition for forgiveness and for dealing with the guilt of sins. This acknowledges our guilt and need for forgiveness, and addresses God as the only One Who can grant this. But this forgiveness is also connected with our willingness to forgive others who have wronged us.

a) And forgive to us our debts/guilt of sins (12a)

This petition is asking God to forgive us for the debt of our guilt. To forgive means to release someone from some consequence and obligation they deserve. It is declining to take any retributive action that rightly could have been taken, or in many cases, should have been taken. This is a request for God not to give us the punishment we justly deserve for the debt of our sins.

And the word “debt” is a word that typically refers to finances, but here is transferred to the moral sphere. It means something that is owed, an obligation to pay or repay. And in this context, it refers to the guilt and moral debt incurred by our sin. So, this is a petition to release us from the obligation and guilt caused by our sin. The problem is, like with financial debt, the person who forgives ends up eating the debt themselves. The person gives up something that is rightly owed.

So, this is a request for God to take the obligation, loss, and punishment of our sin upon Himself instead of requiring it from us, as we justly deserve. On the one hand, this seems like a very presumptuous request. We have no right to ask God to give up on His perfect justice in terms of what we legitimately deserve and owe. It is only by His amazing grace that we have any chance that this kind of request would be granted.

But God has invited us to make this kind of request, not only in this petition, which Jesus taught us to make, but also in the Old Testament sacrificial system. In the Old Testament, God had taught His people that a substitutionary sacrifice would make atonement and take away the moral guilt of their sins. God had provided the means by which people could experience the remission of the debt of their moral guilt before God. So, this petition looks back to the model from the OT sacrificial system. But this petition primarily looked forward to the cross of Christ, where the ultimate fulfillment of the substitutionary sacrifice that takes away the moral obligation and debt of our rebellion took place. God literally did take our debt upon Himself in the punishment of the cross of Christ, so that our sins could be justly forgiven. And so, we are invited to make this request, knowing that He has already provided the means to answer this petition in Christ.

b) As we ourselves also have forgiven to those in debt/guilt to us (12b)

This proposition is closely connected together with the previous one, explaining and elaborating on it. They are connected with the word “as,” which could signal a comparison or possibly a contemporary time. It could be a comparison, that we would be forgiven in the same manner that we have forgiven others. Or it could be a marker of contemporary time, that we would be forgiven while we have forgiven others. In 5:23-24 Jesus told His disciples to be reconciled with other people before offering a sacrifice to God. So, our vertical relationship with God is not completely independent of our horizontal relationships with other people. In either case, Jesus taught us to pray either with a complete willingness to forgive others, or from a standpoint of already having completed forgiving them. This proposition uses the same word for “forgive” as the previous one, but in a tense that signifies a completed action – “we have forgiven.” And the word for “those in debt” is related to the word for “debt” in the previous proposition. Except in the previous proposition, the word signified the “debt” itself. And in this proposition, the word signifies the person who is indebted, the “debtor.” We are to forgive the people, and not just the debt, though the two ideas are obviously related.

In light of the rest of the teaching of the New Testament, we should not take this proposition to mean that our forgiving of others somehow earns or contributes to our own forgiveness. In the same way, we cannot even say that our lack of forgiveness is a hindrance to our forgiveness. Our forgiveness is dependent on Christ and His grace, and not on our merit in any way. A better way to understand this proposition is that our forgiveness of others is a clear indication of our having experienced forgiveness. As Jesus said in Luke 7:47, “He who has been forgiven little, loves little.” Our forgiveness of others is a response to our forgiveness and a fruit of our new life. And we can pray to receive forgiveness, knowing that we will receive it, because we have already seen the result of our ongoing forgiveness in the fact that we are forgiving toward others. And yet, we cannot escape the force of this statement, that we should not expect forgiveness if we are not, or have not been willing to forgive others for the same kind of things for which we are requesting pardon and release. Jesus will elaborate on this proposition in verses 14-15.

5) **Keep us from temptation and evil (13)**

This verse contains two closely related petitions concerning temptation and sin. The first petition is that we be kept from temptation, i.e. that we would not experience temptation, sin and evil. And the second petition is that we be protected from evil on those occasion when we do experience temptation, sin, and evil. This verse builds on the previous verse in that the prior petitions are to deal with past transgressions in restoring our relationship with God and other people. And this verse is proactively working to prevent future transgressions that would break these relationships again.

a) **Neg: Do not bring us into temptation (13a)**

This petition is that we not be brought into temptation. The word “bring” is a common word for causing something to enter – to bring in, to lead in, to cause to experience. This petition is that God Himself would not bring us into temptation, but the implication is that God would also protect us from being brought in by any other factor. In other words, “don’t bring us into...” probably also means “keep us out of...”

And the word translated “temptation” has a range of possible meanings. It can mean “testing” like when something is put to a test to find out something about it, whether it will pass the test. Christians are often tested in this way, sometimes by God. For instance, Jesus tested Phillip, even though He knew what He was about to do (Jn. 6:6) and God tested Abraham (Heb. 11:17 [see also Acts 9:26, 20:19]). And we are to test ourselves and others (2 Cor. 13:5, Rev. 2:2). And this meaning shades into various trials and difficult situations, by which we are tested (Gal. 4:14, Jms. 1:2, 12, 1 Pet. 1:6-7, 4:12). And people have put God to the test, which is a sinful sign of unbelief. This activity is condemned as sinful whenever it is mentioned (Acts 5:9, 15:10, 1 Cor. 10:9, Heb. 3:9). This possible meaning of “testing” is most likely not what Jesus had in mind in this proposition (even though many school kids pray that God would keep them from having to take a test, typically by asking for the school to burn down).

For this word translated “temptation” can also mean the kind of test that is intended to make someone fail the test by enticing them to do something that they should not do, or not to do something they should. This is the normal meaning of the English word “temptation.” This meaning is seen in many verses in the New Testament, such as when the devil tempted Jesus (Matt. 4:1, Lk. 4:13), or when people are tempted (1 Cor. 7:3, 10:13, Gal. 6:1, 1 Thes 3:5, 1 Tim. 6:9, Jms. 1:14, Rev. 2:10). Jesus commanded His disciples to pray that they would not enter into temptation (Matt. 26:41, Mk. 14:38, which is very similar wording to this petition), at the same time when He was tempted and/or tested (Lk. 22:28). And there are many passages where it is not clear whether this word means testing or temptation, or some combination of both meanings (Matt. 16:1, 19:1, 22:18, 22:35, Lk. 8:13, Heb. 2:8, 4:15, 2 Pet. 2:9, Rev. 3:10).

In this context, this word almost certain means temptation in the negative sense. God clearly tests people on some occasions, but He never tempts people, nor can He be tempted (Jms. 1:13). God sometimes allows that we are tempted by evil, and by various situations, and especially by our own sinful inclinations. But temptation and the sin made possible by temptation are certainly not God’s desire for His people. This is a prayer to be protected from temptation, knowing our weakness and susceptibility to temptation. And we know that God wants to, and will protect us from such temptation. We know that we will encounter temptation, but we are to ask God for help to avoid it as much as possible. And often, the times when we think we won’t be tempted, or think we are too strong to be tempted, are the very occasions when temptation comes, and when we most easily fall for it (1 Cor. 10:12). So, Jesus instructed His disciples to pray that God would spare us from temptation.

The old saying goes: “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” This means that it is so much better to prevent something bad than to try to fix it once it happens. This concept is reflected in this petition, that God would somehow keep us from being tempted in the first place. And whenever temptation does happen, that He would keep us from succumbing to that temptation. It is better to avoid and resist temptation than to have the need to be rescued from the results of giving in to it. And we need God’s help, accessed by prayer, in either case. And this model prayer from Jesus even covers the situations where we have given in to temptation and sin, which is reflected in the next proposition.

b) Pos: **But rescue us from evil/the evil one (13b)**

This petition is the flip side of the previous one. The previous request was not to be led into temptation, and this request is to cover those situations where we have come into temptation, sin, evil, and all the results of evil.

This proposition covers the evil that results from our own sin, but it also covers all evil that exists in the world that is not directly the result of our own sin as well. Jesus used a general word for evil that covers all that is wicked, degenerate and morally worthless. This word means bad in a variety of ways, all of which are contrary to God’s character, standards, and design. Some translations say “rescue us from evil” and some say “rescue us from the evil one.” Both possibilities are equally valid according to the word and grammar which Jesus used, and there is no conclusive way to decide between them. They are both true, and we should pray for both. This petition covers rescue from all the personal enemies of God, and also from the impersonal occurrences of evil, whatever they may be. And in the context of verse 12, this especially includes our own sin.

And this petition is that we would be rescued from evil, however it is encountered. The word for “rescue” is also fairly general, and covers all situations. It implies that the danger is severe and we are in genuine peril from it, typically already suffering from its effects. And it also implies that God will remove us from and protect us from this danger completely. We pray that God will rescue us from evil because He is willing and able to completely deliver us, as demonstrated in Christ. Paul advised, whenever we are tempted, to look for God, and for the way out that God has provided in any temptation (see 1 Cor. 10:13). And Peter asserted that “the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials...” (see 2 Pet. 2:9).

In essence, this petition comes from the same root and looks to achieve the same result as the previous petition. They both acknowledge our own weakness and susceptibility to temptation and sin. They both recognize our need to be protected and rescued from evil and all its effects. And they both go to God as the One Who is able to protect us and rescue us. We are completely dependent on God to overcome evil on our behalf because we cannot do so on our own. These propositions are similar to the petition to forgive our moral debts in that they recognize the reality of sin and evil in the world, and especially our part in it. And they recognize that God is greater than sin, and is actively working to defeat all evil, to rescue and cleanse His people from it in all its forms and effects.

6) [For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen]

Some translations contain these phrases at the end of the Lord's prayer. However, none of the earliest and most reliable copies of the Bible have these words in this passage. Neither are these words a part of the Lord's prayer as recorded in Luke chapter 11. Neither do any of the early church fathers, quoting and commenting on this prayer, mention these words. These words began to be included in much later copies of Matthew, likely because they were added to the prayer when it was used in the liturgy of the churches. These words are similar to 1 Chron. 29:11-13 and were almost certainly added to this prayer long after the book of Matthew was written.

That means that these words were not written by Matthew or said by Jesus when He was teaching the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore, they were not intended by Jesus to be a part of the Lord's prayer. And if we don't include them, we are not being irreverent to the Bible, but rather are agreeing with Jesus and Matthew, out of reverence for what they actually said and wrote.

The meaning of these words is fairly self-explanatory. And these phrases are still true and are a good basis for prayer. But they are not the basis which Jesus gave for the model petitions He gave in this passage. Jesus grounded our prayers in God's goodness and Fatherhood, and not in His power, even though His power and sovereign authority are assumed throughout this model prayer. So, these words are ancient tradition, and valuable and true tradition. But they are not a part of the prayer which Jesus originally gave.

### Summary of the Lord's Prayer

This prayer is a model framework and pattern on which we should build our own specific prayers. As such, the order and development of thought is important. Notice that this model prayer is extremely God-centered. It brings us into God's priorities and activities more than it tries to bring God into our own priorities and activities. And even when it does address our own personal needs and desires, it does it from God's perspective.

This prayer starts with address to God as our Heavenly Father, both immanent to hear and care as Father, but also transcendent as powerful sovereign Lord with full ability to answer any petition. And then it transitions to a request for God's acknowledgement and glory as the Holy One over all, as well as a petition that His will would be accomplished and His plans fulfilled on earth, as in Heaven. Praying these requests is to buy into God's purposes for the universe and make them our own. Thus God's glory and God's purposes take precedence over any of our issues in this model prayer. And only then, flowing out of the request for God's will is the petition for our own needs to be supplied. This is not to downplay any of our needs as insignificant, but rather it raises all our needs and issues into the greater significance of God's overall plan for the universe. And God is honored as the One Who can and will supply all our daily needs. And then, not only are our physical needs addressed to God for provision, but also our spiritual needs for forgiveness are addressed to the same Father Who provides. He provides not only forgiveness for our past sins, as we forgive others, but He also provides protection against present and future temptations and evil. And our prayers are addressed to Him as our Father Who will provide and protect, as part of His grand plan, and for His glory.

## B. Prayer is connected with forgiveness (14-15)

This section is not a part of the prayer itself, but is an instructional elaboration on v. 12, about the connection between our willingness to forgive others and our expectation of receiving forgiveness from God. It begins with the word “for” which, in this case, is a marker of explanation, not of reason. This section is a series of two conditions and their results – one stated positively and one stated negatively. These two conditional statements make the same point, just from the standpoint of the two opposite possibilities. As mentioned above regarding v. 12, we should not understand these verses to teach that we somehow earn our forgiveness by forgiving others. But we should clearly understand the connection Jesus made between these two things. We should take His warnings very seriously and not presume upon our own forgiveness if we are not willing to forgive others. Jesus later elaborated on this concept in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:21-35).

### 1. Pos: If you forgive, you will be forgiven (14)

This verse is the positive side of this concept: if we forgive, God will forgive us. This is a conditional statement, but it is not cause and effect. We do not cause our forgiveness by forgiving others. But we can be assured of our forgiveness as we forgive.

#### a. For, if you forgive to people their transgressions/wrongdoings (14a)

This proposition begins with the word “for” which connects this section with the previous petitions, especially with verse 12. And it is a conditional statement, beginning with the word “if.” This sets up the condition (which may be true, or it may be false) for 14b. If this proposition turns out to be true (depending on our response) then 14b will be true as well. This proposition uses the same word “forgive” as was used in v. 12. And our forgiveness in this statement is directed “to the people.” In other words, the forgiveness which Jesus was describing is totally open ended and applies to any and every situation, and to any and every person. But in this proposition, Jesus used a different word – “transgressions” – than He used in v. 12. This word means any violation of moral standards, anything that goes against the law and will of God, including all offenses against other humans. It is something that breaks a rule or norm, doing something that is clearly known to be wrong and a violation of God’s standards of morality. And the word Jesus used is plural. That means that there are no limitations or exceptions given in this verse of any transgressions that we are not to forgive. As Jesus will say later in Matthew, we are to forgive seventy times seven transgressions (see Matt. 18: 22). In other words, there is no limit to the number of transgressions that we are to forgive, any more than there is a limit of our own transgressions for which we may ask forgiveness from God.

#### b. Your Heavenly Father will also forgive to you (14b)

This proposition is the continuation and result of the conditional statement begun in the previous proposition. Notice that Jesus referred to God as “your heavenly Father” using similar language to the way God is addressed at the beginning of the Lord’s prayer. It is the same intimate, yet transcendent, Father Whom we address in prayer, Who is the One we look to for forgiveness. And Jesus used the same word “forgive” as in the previous proposition. The word “transgressions” is not stated in this proposition, but is clearly implied by the grammar. This proposition does not say that God will “forgive you.” But it says that God will “forgive to you [your transgressions].” The result is virtually the same. But here the connection is more clearly made to the previous proposition by using a parallel structure in the way that it was said.

### 2. Neg: If you don’t forgive, you won’t be forgiven (15)

This verse is the negative side of the idea begun in v. 14. It is very similar wording to v. 14, except stating the negative side of the possibility. This verse, likewise, is stating a condition, and what will be true if the condition is true. But it is not stating cause and effect. Jesus still was not teaching that we somehow earn or cause God to forgive us (or not forgive us). But Jesus clearly stated that if we are unforgiving, we should not presume to receive forgiveness from our Heavenly Father.

a. But if you do not forgive to people (15a)

This proposition is almost exactly the same wording as 14a. Except the phrase “the transgressions” is implied but not stated for brevity. And this phrase is stated in the negative by the inclusion of the word “not” – “if you do *not* forgive to people.”

b. Neither will your Father forgive your transgressions/wrongdoings (15b)

This proposition is very similar to 14b, except stated negatively. In the way that He described God, Jesus called Him “your Father,” leaving out the word “heavenly.” There is probably no significance to this omission. It is just stylish for brevity. But in this case, Jesus said He will *not* forgive your transgressions. Jesus used the same words for “forgive” and “transgressions.” The transgressions are clearly stated in this proposition though implied in the previous one, which is the opposite of the way it was stated in the previous verse. This is possibly to emphasize that when the transgressions are unforgiven, they are more significantly connected with us, because they are still a stain and weight on our soul. And the word “transgressions” is plural in this case as well. So, this is a very strong warning that we should avoid unforgiveness to others, because we do not want to bear the burden, guilt, and punishment of our own transgressions before our Heavenly Father.

## Summary:

In this larger section, Jesus taught His disciples about prayer. He continued as part of a series of sections teaching not to do good deeds for the sake of being seen and rewarded by people, for pride’s sake. But rather, we are to do them to be seen and rewarded by God, for His sake. And Jesus taught this lesson about prayer in very similar terms to the other two sections. But in this passage, Jesus expanded His teaching about prayer to include other issues as well. He taught about an additional danger to avoid in prayer – not to think that our prayers are made more effective by rote recital or unthinking flow of many words, like the pagans. Our prayers are not punching a time clock to earn a hearing from God, but rather they are connecting to our heavenly Father, Who already knows our needs before we even ask. Therefore, we should communicate with him using our full attention, with all of our minds, emotions, and passions, not just rattling off many words disconnected from our whole being and concentration. And the last part of this section is a model prayer, where Jesus gave positive teaching and example how we should pray. He included a profound new way to address God as our Heavenly Father. And then He gave an ordered series of petitions for us to imitate in learning to pray in a God-centered and God-honoring way.