

April 26, 2026
Pursuing the Kingdom: The Pattern of Prayer
Matthew 6:9-13
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...

As we come to this all too familiar text today in ch. 6 of Matthew's Gospel, we have to remember the flow of what Jesus has been saying up to this point. Over the last few weeks we have looked at Jesus' warning to his disciples about the danger of doing righteous things, good things like giving, fasting and praying, but doing them for the wrong reasons, just to be seen. And that's the thread running through the whole chapter. The fact that it's possible to do the right things with the wrong heart. It's possible to look spiritual on the outside and yet, actually, be far from God. As theologian and reformer, John Calvin, once said, "The human heart is a perpetual factory of idols," and nowhere is that more subtle than in our devotional practices. Even prayer, something meant to draw us close to God, can be redirected to bring attention to ourselves.

So when Jesus turns to prayer in verses 5–8, the passage we looked at last week, He exposes two flaws that needed to be brought to light. The first flaw was praying out loud to impress people with outward spirituality and flowery words, like the religious leaders who prayed in the synagogues and on the street corners. And the second was praying with empty, or repetitious, words like the pagan Gentiles. The thought being that they could impress God or get His attention if they were louder and repeated the same words over and over again. Jesus corrects both misunderstandings and encourages His disciples to seek the secret place and an authentic prayer life with their Heavenly Father.

And then, right in the middle of this correction, Jesus gives his disciples something remarkable. And it's this familiar passage we know as the Lord's Prayer. And it's not just a command to pray, but a pattern for how to pray. He is going to say, "But when you pray, pray like this..." And this is not a script to mindlessly repeat, but a framework that reshapes how we approach God in prayer.

In other words, Jesus is not just teaching us what to say, He is teaching us how to think, what to desire and how to live. As the theologian and philosopher Augustine once said, "He who knows how to pray has learned the greatest secret of a holy and happy life." So let's look at this prayer and see the pattern that Jesus lays out for us.

If you are able, please stand in honor of God's word and, as you are standing, today we're going to do something a little different. Since our passage this morning is the Lord's Prayer, when we get to the prayer itself, I would like for us all to pray the words together as you see them on the screen. These are the words of Jesus as recorded in Matthew's Gospel ch. 6:9-13. [Read Passage]

Before we jump into the text this morning, we need to understand the Lord's Prayer was never intended to be a scripted prayer to be repeated word for word either in worship services or in our personal prayer lives. It was given by Jesus as more of a model for prayer and it shows us how to approach God by shaping our priorities and desires rather than offering a formula to robotically recite. It is deeply personal and relational, guiding us into

communion with the Father, not a performance before others, as Jesus has previously warned his followers about.

You may also notice that some versions include the closing line, “For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen,” while others do not. It’s interesting that that ending is not found in the earliest manuscripts of Matthew and so the more literal translations like the ESV and others do not include it. It was most likely added later as a doxology used in the worship of the early church. While it beautifully reflects biblical truth about God’s glory, the original focus of Jesus’ teaching remains on the pattern of prayer itself centered on God’s name, God’s kingdom and daily dependence on Him.

As we get into the prayer itself, Jesus begins with these simple but profound words, “Our Father in heaven.” Before anything is asked, identity is established, both God’s and ours. You see, prayer starts with relationship. God is not approached as a distant force, but as a Father. And if He is our Father, that makes us His children. And that word, “Father,” would have been both comforting and shocking to Jesus’ listeners. Comforting, because it speaks of God’s intimacy, care, provision and nearness toward us. But shocking, because it invites ordinary people into a kind of closeness with God that many would have thought was reserved for the most righteous.

You see, in the entire Old Testament, God is rarely referred to as Father and never directly addressed as “Father” in personal prayer. And first-century Jews viewed God with immense reverence and awe, typically not even uttering His name. Using a term like “father” seemed far too personal and informal. Yet, now Jesus is inviting his disciples into an intimate relationship with the Father that is available to all believers through faith and, as children of God, the nature of prayer has now changed from mere acts of formal worship to personal conversation.

And notice that Jesus does not say “my Father,” but “our Father.” Even in private prayer, there is a communal aspect at play here. As we have been discussing together in our community groups, we, as a church, belong to a family of families. You never come to God alone, you come as part of His people. Even in our personal prayers, we belong to His family and are part of His body.

But Jesus balances this intimacy with reverence when he adds, “in heaven.” Our Heavenly Father is not like us. He is above us, He is sovereign, He is holy and He is ruling over all things. So right from the start, prayer holds together two realities we often separate, closeness and reverence or wonder. He is near enough to know us and, yet, great enough to rule the universe.

Many of us lean too far one way or the other. We either treat God too casually, as if He exists merely to serve us and give us what we want or think we deserve. Or we keep Him at a distance, as if He is unreachable. But here, Jesus brings those two things together. So, when we pray, “Our Father in Heaven,” we are speaking to our Father who loves us, speaking of His closeness, and at the same time, to the King who reigns over everything. Oh, what a privilege is ours that we, who were once separated from God because of our sin, have been brought near and into a relationship with God through Christ and his atoning work for us on the cross.

Then Jesus moves to the first request, “Hallowed be your name.” Before we ask for anything for ourselves, we are taught to desire God’s glory. To “hallow” something or, more

importantly someone, means to treat them as holy, to honor or revere them. This is not just about saying the right words. It's about longing for God's name, His character and His reputation to be honored in our lives and in the world.

Think about how often our prayers begin with us; our needs, our problems and our plans. Jesus gently, but firmly, reminds us to forget about ourselves and to start with God. A helpful way to think about it is that prayer is not first about getting God to align with your agenda, but about aligning your heart with His. Abraham Lincoln once said during the American Civil War when he was asked if God was on the side of the Union, "Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right."

It's like tuning a musical instrument. Before you begin to play, you have to adjust the instrument to the right pitch. If it's out of tune, everything that follows will just sound off. In the same way, "hallowed be your name" is like tuning our hearts. It brings us back into alignment. It reminds us that life is not ultimately about us and our plans, it's about God and His. And when that becomes the starting point, everything else in prayer begins to fall into place. Prayer begins by re-centering our focus on God Himself.

Jesus continues in vs 10, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Now the focus expands from God's name to God's reign. The kingdom of God has been a central theme from the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus came announcing that the kingdom is at hand and that God's rule is breaking into the world. So when we pray "your kingdom come," we are asking for more of God's reign in our lives, in our communities and in the world. This is the driving force behind our theme for this year, "Pursuing the Kingdom."

But this is not a vague or abstract request. It becomes personal very quickly. To pray for God's kingdom to come is to invite His authority into every area of our lives. It's saying, God, rule over my decisions, rule over my relationships, rule over my desires and my ambitions. It's a surrender of our control. And that's where this prayer can become uncomfortable, because many of us want God's help without wanting His rule. We want His provision, but not His authority. But Jesus does not separate the two. To seek the kingdom is to submit to the King. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, "When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die." Kingdom prayer is costly because it reorders our lives from trying to build our own kingdoms to pursuing and participating in the building the Kingdom of God.

And the phrase, "Your will be done" takes it even deeper. This is not just about what God does out there, it's about what He does in here. Again, it's a prayer of surrender, especially in moments when God's will is not what we would naturally choose. And because of our sinful nature it very rarely ever is. This part of the prayer echoes what Jesus Himself will later pray in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before his crucifixion when He said, "not my will, but yours be done." There is a cost to honestly praying this way. It means trusting that God's wisdom is better than ours, even when it leads us through difficulty. And so truthfully, this type of prayer becomes the place where our will is bent toward His.

After lifting our eyes to God's name and God's kingdom, Jesus then turns to our needs in vs. 11, "Give us this day our daily bread." Notice the simplicity of this request.

We're not asking for abundance. We're not asking for excess, but daily bread. It's a prayer of dependence. It reminds us that everything we have ultimately comes from God. In a culture that values self-sufficiency and getting everything we can and hoarding it for ourselves, this kind of prayer pushes against our instinct and natural desires. We like to think we are in control, that we provide for ourselves. But Jesus teaches us to live with open hands, recognizing that even the most basic provisions are gifts from our Father who is in heaven which should be reflected in our generosity and our giving as believers.

There is also something beautifully grounding about the phrase "this day." This type of prayer brings us back into the present. Instead of being consumed with tomorrow's worries or yesterday's regrets, something we will go into more detail when we get to the end of chapter 6, we are invited to trust God for what we need today.

Here, Jesus is pointing back to the manna first described for us in the Old Testament, in the Book of Exodus ch. 16. God provided manna from heaven for Israel while they were wandering in the desert, wandering in rebellion by the way. And He provided for them one day at a time, just enough for each day, and anything the Israelites tried to hoard for themselves would spoil. The lesson was about dependence on God. In the same way, Jesus calls us to trust God by learning to rely on Him daily rather than trying to control tomorrow and the future. And that dependence is not weakness, it's the pathway to deeper trust. This kind of prayer anchors us in God's grace for today.

Well, then comes one of the most revealing aspects of this pattern of prayer in vs. 12, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." You may have learned this prayer with the word trespasses. It was the word used in the earliest English translations of the Bible, but as more Greek manuscripts have been discovered and analyzed, the words used here have a closer meaning to the words debt and debtors and so that is why most modern English translations have made the switch.

Either way, the point is our greatest need is not material, but spiritual. We need forgiveness. Sin is described in scripture as a debt, a real offense against God that we cannot repay on our own. So we come asking for mercy, trusting in God's grace. And the good news is that God, in His mercy, has made a way through Jesus. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23) He bore our debt so we could be forgiven. When we turn to Him in repentance and faith, we receive His gift of grace freely.

But then, notice, Jesus immediately connects receiving forgiveness with extending it, "As we also have forgiven our debtors." This is not about earning God's forgiveness, but about the evidence of a transformed heart. When you truly grasp how much you have been forgiven, it begins to reshape how you treat others. If we are harboring unforgiveness in our hearts, it reveals that we have not fully understood grace. This is why Jesus returns to this point in vs. 14-15, which we will get to next week, because it matters that much. The point is that prayer is not just about our relationship with God vertically, but it affects how we live in our relationship with others horizontally.

Finally, Jesus says, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." This is a prayer for guidance and protection as it acknowledges our weakness. Interestingly, the Greek phrase used here can legitimately be translated either "evil," in general or "the evil one," referring to our adversary, Satan. The wording itself allows for both meanings. The fact

is, it's likely that Jesus intends a layered meaning here. The prayer recognizes both the presence of evil in the world and the one who stands behind it. So when we pray this way, we are asking God to guard us from sin and to protect us from any spiritual attack of the evil one and ultimately deliver us from all that opposes His kingdom.

Now, this is not a prayer of fear, but of humility. It recognizes that the Christian life is not lived in our own strength, but in dependence on God's leading through the power of the Holy Spirit. Prayer becomes part of our daily vigilance and our dependence on Him.

Now, when we step back and look at this prayer as a whole, we begin to see the pattern clearly. Prayer starts with God, His name, His kingdom and His will, giving him all the honor and glory that he so richly deserves. Then it moves to us, to our needs, our forgiveness and our protection. You see, it's not just a rote prayer to recite, it's a re-ordering of our priorities. It teaches us to seek first God's kingdom, trusting that everything else will be provided by our Heavenly Father.

So how do we apply this to our everyday lives, specifically in prayer? First, again, the point is not to recite these words mindlessly, but use these words of Jesus to shape how we pray. Begin your prayers by praising God for who He is. Ask for His kingdom to come in specific areas of your life. Bring your needs honestly before Him. Confess your sins and extend forgiveness to others and seek His guidance and protection. And over time, this pattern will begin to reshape your heart. When you start to want what God wants you will begin to see life through the lens of His kingdom.

And there's also a deeper invitation here. This prayer is not just about prayer, it's about life itself. It's about living in such a way that God's name is honored, His kingdom is sought and His will is done in your life. It's about daily dependence, ongoing repentance and humble trust. In other words, it is a picture of what it means to truly pursue the kingdom of God.

So, as we close this morning, consider this, the greatest danger in a passage like this is familiarity. Many of us have heard these words countless times. Many of us can recite them without even thinking about what we are saying in whatever version we learned it. But Jesus did not give us this prayer for it to become routine, something to simply recite without giving any thought to what we are saying. He gave it as a pattern of prayer to transform us. To re-align our priorities and to focus on Him and what He is doing. And so the question is not whether you know this prayer but whether this pattern of prayer is shaping how you communicate with the Father.

What would it look like if we actually thought about it and took the time to slow down and pray this way? To begin each prayer with God instead of ourselves? To fully surrender our plans to His will? To actually trust Him for today's needs? To actually confess our sin and receive God's forgiveness while, at the same time, forgiving others when they have wronged us? These are the types of honest and authentic conversations God desires to have with His children.

In the end, prayer is not about saying the right things, or impressing people with our flowery words, it's about becoming the kind of people who seek first the kingdom of God. And when that becomes the posture of our hearts, we discover something deeper than God simply answering our prayers. We discover the Father Himself. Let's pray.

Benediction: May you go in the grace of the Father, seeking His name above all things. May His kingdom shape your desires, His will guide your steps and His provision sustain you each day. May you walk in the freedom of forgiveness, extending that same grace to others, and may He guard and deliver you from all evil. Amen.