

Forming Our Prayer

Series: Connecting with God in Prayer

January 24, 2016 - Brad Bailey

Big Idea: To help us capture some main aspects of what prayer can include... drawing broadly from the Lords Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13)...developing 4 parts that form the Acrostic for PRAY; being Praise, Restore, Ask, and Yield.

Intro

Have you ever faced something where it seemed so big...that you wondered...“Where do I begin?” Maybe you found yourself faced with a task so challenging you didn’t know where to start? Maybe you were facing **doing your taxes** for the first time. Or pulled over on the side of the road when your car broke down...**staring at the engine**. But this can **also be true of great opportunities**. If I told you that you were just selected to travel on a trip to space. You might think...wow... what do I need to do? Or if you were told you were going to have the most powerful figure in the world come visit you....you might wonder...what do I need to do?

When we face something that seems beyond our understanding...when we are overwhelmed... **we need someone to help us grasp the essentials.**

> **Jesus does that for us** in our text this morning **concerning how to pray.**

We are **continuing in a new focus and series** for this New Year called “**Connecting with God in Prayer.**” **Connection is what we deeply long for...and there is no connection more profound and powerful than connection with God. That is the power of prayer. Prayer is our opportunity to connect to God, the Creator of the universe.**

Last week...we began noting that Jesus disciples...having watched how he bore something beyond this world...an authority.... Power...compassion...they realized it flowed from the connection he had with God...and so those who first followed Jesus ...asked...

“Lord, teach us to pray.” – Luke 11:1

Lord, teach us to pray. How can we learn to pray like you?

They realized that all of what flowed from Jesus...flowed from this connection to the Father in heaven....it flowed from prayer.

Prayer is the connection...it’s where **our spiritual nature connects with the Spirit of God**...the very Spirit which created the world...the very Spirit breathed life into our material nature.

The disciples asked Christ this question because **they saw something different.**

These men had been going to the temple—all of their lives. They had recited hundreds of prayers and had heard the priests pray out loud. Yet when they saw Christ, they knew they were missing something. So they asked, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

Jesus begins by warning them...and us...to **not be like the hypocrites**...which means actors...those who focus more on those around them than on God Himself.

Jesus calls us out.....says essentially... Drop religion. Go for the real thing... for relationship.

Jesus knows that **we are no longer naturally oriented in relationship to God.**

So he calls us to focus on God....and to understand that prayer is about reorienting ourselves around Him.

He now offers an example of what the heart of such prayer might express. In Matthew 6... Jesus gives us a good foundation for prayer. That has become known commonly as ‘The Lord’s Prayer.’

Matthew 6:9-13 (ESV)

Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Before we begin to grasp the power of each part of what he said...it’s helpful to consider what the prayer as a whole represents.

What was his intent for this prayer? Was it simply a prayer that his followers could memorize and recite together?

While this prayer has often been read aloud together through the centuries...and is so fitting as a communal prayer... **I believe that Jesus shared these words not just for stating ...but for shaping...shaping the central matters of relating with God...matters of the soul. He was sharing a pattern fitting of their communion with God.**

That is why Jesus began stating what could be translated ‘pray LIKE this’...or ‘in his manner.’ It suggests that he intended for this to capture how prayer can shape life centered in God.

As Samuel Zwemer once wrote,

It contains “every possible desire of the praying heart; it contains a whole world of spiritual requirements, and combines in simple language every divine promise, every ... aspiration for the good of others.” [1]

Andrew Murray said that...

The Lord’s Prayer is “a form of prayer that becomes the model and inspiration for all other prayer, and yet always draws us back to itself as the deepest utterance of our souls before God.” [1]

We chose this prayer as our focus just a couple years ago... focusing on each line. [2]

(It could be a rich resource to use by going to our website where you can get the notes or audio for that series.)

Today... we are **simply going to draw upon this prayer** and Christ’s example of prayer as a whole, and **capture the main elements that can help form our prayer with God.**

I want to share **4 main elements... given in the form of an acrostic.** Let me be clear that I’m **not suggesting this as any type of formula.** It is **simply a way to think of the parts and**

process...especially if you're getting started or re-started in a regular pattern of prayer. It's really a **pattern for relationship**... drawn in part from the themes of Christ's prayer.

The first element that is essential for connecting with God...is

Praise (Recognizing the reality of who God is.)

Praise refers to every way in which we might acknowledge the truth of God's goodness and greatness.

Have you ever had someone talk to you...without any regard for who you are?

If I came up to you and called you by the wrong name... and then began talking about you in ways that clearly didn't recognize who you were... would it help connection or block connection?

It doesn't create connection...in fact it accentuates disconnection.

Intimacy begins with the recognition of another as other...as distinct from ourselves...and honoring that difference.

So it is with our ultimate Creator and Father.

Jesus begins..

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

Jesus declared that indeed we were created to know God as our Father... those who were created bearing His image...to share life as partners in this created world. We left the household (as Jesus described in the parable of the Prodigal Son)...and have chosen to be separated from life with Him. This is what Christ came to restore...to reconcile us by bearing our sin...our separation. So if we receive Christ...his life...his death on our behalf...and his life now lived in us... we are restored as children of God...and God is our Father.

There is something so powerful in those words "Our Father." We do well to **pause long enough** when we pray **to appreciate the right to say, "Our Father."** It's not something you have earned. It is something Jesus has earned for you. **Don Carson** says, **"When believers pray 'Our Father in heaven,' they cannot but be hushed and humbled."**

It's amazing how **life begins to come into perspective with those two words.** There may not be money to pay the rent. There may be health problems, relationship problems, money problems—but I have the right by the grace of God to begin with those two words, "Our Father." I may look poor; but those two words mean I'm rich, "Our Father". [1b]

It is that relationship that **gives us the boldness to even come to God.**

It is that relationship that **gives us confidence to make our requests known to Him.** It is that relationship that provides assurance that the prayer will make a difference.

“in heaven”... He is not limited the way our earthly fathers are. He **reigns in the eternal greatness...transcends all the powers of this created world.**

“Hallowed be your name”...your name is holy.

Referring to one’s name...means referring to one’s nature...one’s essence... (reflected a bit in the way we might say someone “made a name for themselves”).

> **He is declaring that the nature of God is holy...which means set apart...distinct.**

“Ascribe to the Lord, the glory due his name.” – Psalm 29:2 (cf. Psalm 96:8, 1 Chronicles 16:29)

Stop to recognize...realize... the reality of God as the source of all...the source of all creation....all good...all mercy.

This is what the Psalms impart to us. They are an inspired journal of prayer...many by David... the King of Israel. And he regularly begins with declaring to himself the greatness of God. **It's turning knowledge of God into acknowledgment.**

Listen to his prayers....

Psalm 8:1-6, 9 (NLT)

O LORD, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens.
² You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you. ³ When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers— the moon and the stars you set in place— ⁴ what are people that you should think about them, mere mortals that you should care for them? ⁵ Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. ⁶ You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority... ⁹ O LORD, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!

He considers not just His power but also His character.

Psalm 63:3: “Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You.”

Every other element of relating to God flows from the realization of who He is.

Our recognition of Him, and who He is in relationship to our lives allows the flow of our relationship, putting into perspective all that may follow in our prayer.

About **half of the words in this prayer** are devoted to **who God is**; the other half is focused on our needs. **That’s a good ratio to keep in mind** as we pray for God’s glory and our good.

Our Father is in heaven. This is where prayer must begin.

This is the **hardest and easiest** element of prayer.

It's the hardest because most of us have a **hard time getting out of our own orbit**... breaking out of our own gravitational pull. We tend to relate to ourselves as the center... the subject... and God as the object...the one which we direct...and control...with our words and our wills.

Psalm 46:10 - "Be still, and know that I am God."

It takes effort to break out of our gravitational pull. And that is where the power of praise and thanksgiving serves us well.

When the rocket needs fuel to lift off...the recognition of all that is good will serve us well ... and **gratitude for that goodness will serve us well.**

And that is **why it is also easy once we start**...because there is **so much to acknowledge when we choose to.**

There is **no limit here.** To reflect upon God's **goodness**...His **mercy**...His **justice**... all that he declares to be good and right...it changes us.

Lets take a moment **Let's take a personal moment to consider the reality of who God is.**

A personal moment:

What are some of the gifts that have been provided in life?

What are some attributes and virtues of God?

What are some of the names that have been used to reflect God's nature? [4]

(About one minute given for personal reflection...for which all are encourage to write whatever comes to them. This is given at each of four personal moments that follow each element of prayer.)

After recognizing who God is, we naturally come to the second element that can form our prayer.

Restore (Confessing whatever is out of alignment with God's heart and will.)

Having recognized God and who He is to be in our lives, it is **natural to admit** where our relationship is **out of alignment.**

Confession is an opportunity to come out from the "hiddenness" where shame alienates us from God.

In his example of prayer...Jesus includes:

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

Prayer is always a meeting of mercy for anyone who will be honest.

1 John 1:9

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all righteousness."

The Father knows our struggles. **His desire is for our agreement**, placing ourselves "**on the same side**" of the struggle. Only in such open agreement can His relationship empower us. Therefore our prayer may take up the heart of the Psalmist,

Psalm 139:23-24 –

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

(In the weeks ahead we will engage more deeply in the gift of repentance...of realignment...that brings not only forgiveness...but freedom from the powers of greed, and lust, and unforgiveness / contempt. But today....let us grasp that such a need is never far from the heart that seeks to connect with God.)

Let's take a moment...and another personal moment and ask ourselves...

A personal moment: What are you most aware of in your life (thoughts, heart, behavior), that is not in alignment with God's heart and will?

After we've recognized who God is and we have aligned ourselves with his will through the restoration process we can then ask...

Ask (Bringing your needs to God as the ultimate provider of all good and grace.)

Having established our relationship, we can begin to bring our desires to God.

It's been noted that **we often can relate to God as a cosmic vending machine.** We can think of prayer as just bringing God our list of needs.

That tendency will prove futile and frustrating... for as we have noted... prayer is not about pulling God into our gravitational pull...but of coming around His gravitational pull...for He is at the center... and He is the one whose glory ...goodness is what we need.

But if we have acknowledged who He is... in Praise...and acknowledged our position of humility... then seeking our needs is not just acceptable...it's exactly what He desires.

In fact...we are **fundamentally dependent on God for life...and acknowledging that** is a way of **honoring Him. Such dependency is quite different from the nature of demanding. Demanding something presumes we deserve it. Dependency presumes only our need. That is what we hear in what Christ gives us in his words...**

"Give us today our daily bread."

Notice that this trust in God is for each day. In the first century, bread had to be made on a daily basis. They couldn't just buy a couple loaves and put them in the freezer. Like manna that comes once a day, it shaped life as rooted in a daily dependency. Today we live with refrigeration...and bank accounts...and so many ways in which we think we have provided for ourselves...and if we come up short at any time...THEN we might consider having needs we tell God about. But in truth...it's an illusion... every source of need is ultimately from God.

We do well to consider the wisdom of Proverbs, when the writer says...

Proverbs 30:8: "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread."

The point of the prayer is not for us to get what we want, but to receive what we need. [5]

If we embrace our dependency... then asking God for our needs is EXACTLY what He desires.

We need to be confident in expressing our needs and the needs of others to our heavenly Father, bearing in mind that first and foremost we are to be seeking the Kingdom of God. (Matt. 6:31-34) Our Creator and Father desires to provide strength and guidance as well as earthly provisions. Accordingly **He longs for us to ask Him about and for:**

- our inner personal lives and daily needs
- our friends, family, co-workers
- our personal and shared ministry (i.e. church, missionaries, etc.)
- the battles in the social system around us

Personal moment: What is something you actually are in need of right now?

The final core element of prayer we could refer to as:

Yield (Waiting on what the Spirit of God may communicate to your spirit.)

While a yielded posture underlies all parts of our prayer, it is the more specific element of **listening** that is to be included here. In the same way that a yellow "yield" sign on the road indicates that we are to give the right of way, so we are to **stop and give the right of way to God...**to whatever He may desire to impart.

It will be mostly about that which expands God's reign...in us...and through us.

Jesus came to serve God's plans on earth...and in prayer he became both deeply rooted in his identity, and in his mission. When he chose who would be his disciples... and spread the work of his Kingdom...we are told that he prayed all night. I don't know if God the Father was imparting names to him...or just a clear inner sense of who he should choose...but the next day he seemed clear on who he chose...and had insights about their lives.

Jesus said he was only doing what the Father was doing...how did he sense what the Father was doing? Prayer. The Spirit of God...gave direction to his spirit. Jesus wants us to live by this same leading.

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to lead us.

"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." - John 14:26

The Spirit of God may speak to us as a voice to our inner being (spirit) or direct us to Scripture or Scriptural truth that a friend or pastor has taught. As God is unchanging and the

truths of His Fatherly counsel are unchanging, it is natural that the Holy Spirit as Counselor may direct us to such principles of guidance that speak to our present situations. Take time to listen for His consolation, counsel and direction. (Psalm 25:14; Proverbs 2:1-6; Jeremiah 33:3)

(Next week...going to focus on Hearing God's Voice)

Personal moment: Ask God about something significant in your life....to speak to you about it.

If the four parts noted offer a good reminder of the core elements of prayer... I want to note **two further qualities**... that simply **take the core** of the word **'PRAY'** and extend it to that of **'PRAYER.'** They speak to **two qualities** that can **help us conclude prayer well.**

Expect - Expectation is the closing step of having truly come into movement with God. Anticipate His sovereignty and love at work.

I read about some residents of a drought stricken community in West Texas who contacted the local pastor and ask him if he would call a special prayer meeting to pray for rain. He gladly agreed and the date and time were set for the meeting. The people all assembled one evening on a hills side to pray for rain. When the minister arrived he gazed upon the assembly and said, "Let us go home. There is no sense in praying tonight. Not one of us brought an umbrella."

"In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation." - Psalm 5:3

Finally...

Release - As prayer has brought us to the true God, we can depart free from the weight of "god-like" burden we often carry. Having done what is wise with that which is beyond our power, let us be released to that which has been given for us to do.

This prayeris a prayer that brings not just words...but our will...and our participation. [6]

CLOSING:

Sang a declaration of the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father" (Bethel Music, Featuring Jenn Johnson - Our Father, Album: For the Sake of the World, Year: 2012) Another option is to read together the 'Lord's Prayer',

Matthew 6:9-13

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

Notes:

1. Boice, J. M. (2002). *The Sermon on the Mount: An expositional commentary (165–166)*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

1b. Statements drawn from Richard Tow

2. Henry Ward Beecher, famous preacher from early in the last century wrote of the Lord's Prayer,

"I used to think the Lord's Prayer was a short prayer; but, as I live longer, and see more of life, I believe there is no such thing as getting through it. If a man, in praying that prayer, were to be stopped by every word until he had thoroughly prayed it, it would take him a lifetime."
Christian Reader, Vol. 34

3. The Scriptures see the role of honoring God with praise and thanksgiving as an essential element of what all prayer should bear.

Philippians 4:6

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Colossians 4:2

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 13:15

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

Ephesians 5:19-20

speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

Luke 22:19-20

And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.

Psalms 34:1-4

I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul will make its boast in the LORD; The humble will hear it and rejoice. O magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together.

Psalm 103:1-5

Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; read more.

Philippians 1:3-6

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

Romans 1:8

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

2 Corinthians 8:1

Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,

Ephesians 1:16

do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;

2 Thessalonians 1:3

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater;

See also - [Prayers of Praise](#) by [Mike Bennett](#)

4. It may be helpful to begin our special times with God by:

- Giving thanks and praise for what He has provided and done.
- Singing a familiar worship song
- Reading a Psalm
- Rewrite a Psalm in a personal form
- Reflecting on particular attributes or descriptions of God (Rock, Fortress, Deliverer, etc.)
- Reflect on the names that reflect God's nature.

Each of the names of God reveals some aspect of his character.

Elohim – the mighty Creator (Gen 1:1)

Adonai – master or Lord (Gen 15 – Abraham)

El Shaddai – Almighty (Gen 17 – Abraham)

El-Elyon- Most High (Gen 14 – Abraham)

El Roi - The Strong one that Sees (Gen 16 – Hagar)

El Olam - Everlasting God (Gen 21:22-33)

Jehovah – self-existent one (Exodus 3: 14-15 – Moses)

Jehovah Jireh – the Lord our Provider (Gen 22)
 Jehovah Nissi – the Lord our Banner (Exodus 17:8-16)
 Jehovah Rophe –the God who Heals (Exodus 15:22-26)
 Jehovah Shalom – the Lord of our Peace (Jud. 6:11-24)
 Jehovah Shammah – the Lord is Here (Ezekiel 48:30-35)

As Rick Warren notes,

Notice Jesus talks about God's name being holy. Did you know God has many names? In the Bible, a name was a clue to a person's character. The Bible reveals the character of God through the names it uses for God. Through these names, we learn that -

- God Is Present With Me
- God Is My Shepherd
- God Is My Provider
- God Is My Healer
- God Is My Peace
- God Is My Victory In Conflict

Praying the names of God reminds you of who he is and what He has done for you - and that will stir up love in your heart for him. You begin worshipfully praying by giving God your love.

(From [When You Pray, Begin With Praise](#))

Charles Spurgeon captured the the role pf praise and thanksgiving well when he wrote:

“We are to pray about everything, and with every prayer we must blend our thanksgivings. Hence it follows that we ought always to be in a thankful condition of heart: since we are to pray without ceasing, and are not to pray without thanksgiving, it is clear that we ought to be always ready to give thanks unto the Lord. We must say with the Psalmist, "Thus will I bless thee while I live; I will lift up my hands in thy name." The constant tenor and spirit of our lives should be adoring gratitude, love, reverence, and thanksgiving to the Most High.

Aristotle rightly observes: "A return is required to preserve friendship between two persons," and as we have nothing else to give to God except gratitude, let us abound therein. If we have no fruit of the field, let us at least render to him the fruit of our lips. Have you no thanks to bring? How, then, can you expect further favours? Does not liberality itself close its hand when ingratitude stands in the way? What, never a word of gratitude to him from whom all blessings flow! Then may even the ungodly despise you.

Next, it would argue great selfishness if we did not combine praise with prayer. Can it be right to think only of ourselves, to pray for benefits and never honour our Benefactor? What, no thought for God's glory! No idea of magnifying his great and blessed name! God forbid that we should fall into a spirit so mean and narrow. Healthy praise and thanksgiving must be cultivated, because they prevent prayer from becoming overgrown with the mildew of selfishness.”

[Prayer Perfumed with Praise](#), A Sermon by Charles Spurgeon, (April 20th, 1879)

5. Martin Luther wrote in 1529: “What does daily bread mean? Everything that nourishes our body and meets its needs, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, yard, fields, cattle, money, possessions, a devout spouse, devout children, devout employees, devout and faithful rulers,

good government, peace, health, discipline, honor, good fiends, faithful neighbors and other things like these...”

6. Richard Tow cites the following from Robert Guelich, *A Foundation for Understanding the Sermon on the Mount* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1982) p. 310 writes, “By addressing this petition to God in the passive voice, one asks God Himself to act by revealing Himself in history both through His redemptive activity and through His own people. Consequently, to utter this petition is not to speak carelessly or thoughtlessly. One makes this petition as an expression of one’s offering of oneself for God’s service (cf. 5:16 and 6:19-24) as well as an anticipation of God’s final Eschatological revelation of Himself as the Holy One.”

7. There are many ways to form prayer. One thing that many have found helpful is the use of keeping a journal of our prayer times. I have even used the PRAY acrostic to move through such times.

If it sounds foreign... the Book of Psalms can be thought of as a part of King David’s prayer and worship journal... where he wrote out his thoughts and cries to God... and what God impressed upon him in response.

Many have found a personal journal has served their devotional life in several ways....

- A journal can be a wonderful part of shutting the door and creating that private place.
- Provides a place to write down and remember specific requests and needs.
- Provides a place to write out some prayers.... Which can help refine what’s going on within us. If we find our minds are to active or distracted....we can use writing to focus your thoughts.
- It also provides a place to write down what God impresses and speaks to us... and to track his faithfulness over time. (I have found that many times great things unfold that we forget that we had specifically prayed for.) I can look back and remember the things that were important.
- One can also use it to write down other thoughts that may come to mind while praying...which are valuable but potentially distracting.