

### Matthew 6:9-13

New International Version	Holman Christian Standard Bible	English Standard Version	King James Version
<p><sup>9</sup> “This, then, is how you should pray:</p> <p>“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, <sup>10</sup> your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread. <sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’</p>	<p><sup>9</sup> “Therefore, you should pray like this:</p> <p>Our Father in heaven, Your name be honored as holy. <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us today our daily bread. <sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]</p>	<p><sup>9</sup> Pray then like this:</p> <p>“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread, <sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.</p>	<p><sup>9</sup> After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. <sup>10</sup> Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread. <sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.</p>

## **In God's Presence**

### **Surely the Presence of the Lord is in this Place**

God meets our condition, as the Quakers say. In fact the most trustworthy thing we can say about God is: where we are there God is also. This is most especially true when it comes to prayer. We live in the presence of God. This is not something that happens only in church or at religious gatherings. It makes no difference where you find yourself whether it be at Darrien Lake or The Golden Nugget we are in the presence of God. In fact, our relationship with God is inescapable.

Psalm 139:7 reads; "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?" The Psalmist makes it plain that there is nowhere you can escape the presence of God. Actually, the God of the universe knows us more intimately than we know ourselves. Thus, prayer is one of the vehicles we use to acknowledge and uplift the omnipresence of God.

We often speak of prayers as a form of communication with God which is accurate. I want you to also think of prayer as an openness to God. The ever-present, all-knowing, all-powerful God of the universe initiates relationship with us and invites us to open ourselves to the everything that He is; and also relates to us in an intimate and contextual way. God's presence in our lives works as we are in order to help us see what situations can be. This communion- this relationship- is a constant and loving interplay between creative possibility and the results of past-decision making. Our openness to God is an acceptance and recognition of the state of grace that covers our very existence.

We recognize that we live in an interdependent world. Prior to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many believed in American-style rugged individualism. Now we recognize that interdependence is a reality that we cannot escape; especially in the African-American context.

The actuality of our relationship with God, even when we choose to ignore or fail to realize it, is foundational to our existence- and idea that theologians call prevenient grace. (Prevenient grace is God choosing you and showing you kindness before you had a solid knowledge of who He is. Because you were

chosen by God before the foundations of the world God initiates His kindness in your life regardless of where you are in life's journey.) The often-quoted verse says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have everlasting life" (John 3:16). As a Christian this underscores the reality that God desires so much to be in relationship with creation that God constantly uses various methods to reach out to us. Paul shares with us in Romans 5:8-9; "But God proves his love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, we will be saved through him from the wrath of God. The truth is that from the moment God brought creation into being God has and always will be in relationship with all the universe that he created. We can never escape the presence of God. It is also safe to share that God never abandons us. This is most surely affirmed by Bruce Epperly, "God never gives up on anyone or anything."

### **Prayer Changes Things**

We all know from our own experiences that the idea of "prayer changes things" is synonymous to religious devotion. This is far from the image that the deist presents of a distant uninvolved God as we can be. The God we love worship and serve is one that is intricately involved in the day to day affairs and agendas of men.

The God that won't leave us alone is the same God who works unceasingly for our good. It is quite common for us to quote Romans 8:28, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Although prayer is not the main idea in this text, it should not be excluded from the conversation. The discussion is really one of the emphasis. How do we know, or do we measure God's activity on behalf of our good? There is probably no metric we can observe scientifically, but experience tells us that God-to the greatest extent divinely possible-works for the greatest possible good for each and every part of the creation.

The idea that prayer changes things does not mean that reality is inconsequential. God works with things as they are to bring them to where they can be. He also intervenes in the consequences of our actions to bring about and effect change in situations for our good.

## **Prayer is our Grounding Experience in and with God**

A person once asked, “what is so special about prayer that makes it an edifying way to have a relationship with God?” The immediate answer given was, “nothing”. There is nothing intrinsically ordinary or special about prayer. In fact, what is remarkable about it is prayer is extraordinarily ordinary. It requires no special equipment. It demands no special status. It is something you can practice at any place at any time. Prayer is the most democratic religious act that can be performed.

The inclusiveness of prayer marks it as part of grounding of what it means to be human. As I pointed earlier, prayer is ingredient to nourishing a healthy relationship with our Creator. Nothing can be more important, and yet nothing may be more frightening.

Prayer is a matter of exposure. Those things we can hide from everyone else, we cannot hide from God. We pray as if God only hears or knows what we tell him. That’s preposterous! We spend so much effort justifying or rationalizing our thoughts and actions to ourselves and others that we begin to believe that we can do the same thing with God. The truth is we cannot. God sees through all of our self-serving rationalizations and knows perfectly the unvarnished truth of who you are.

The amazing thing is that God loves us beyond-more honestly, in spite of- our efforts to justify our behavior. God loves us just as we are. Simultaneously if you are saved this should be the most comforting and the most discomfoting experience we should have. Honesty does that to a person.

When we are honest in the presence of God we find the depth of our humanity and the ground of our being in this practice of communion. It is an enactment of love.

## **The Relationship of Prayer to Love**

There are four types of love presented to us in the New Testament; they are eros (Koine Grk. Ερως), storge (Στοργη), phileo(Φιλεω), and agape (Αγαπη). Eros is the wordly kind of love because it is related to the idea of physical (i.e. sexual)

contact. Storge is a natural love out of obligation or family love. Philia is love between brothers or brotherly love. This is often interpreted friendship. This leaves agape as the highest and most divine expression of love. Yet, what does agape really seek to do.

The traditional understanding goes that agape is a selfless form of love because it gives and asks for nothing in return. This does not match our experience of or statements about God. Interestingly enough this idea of agape love distorted our view of a covenantal God. To say that God loves us and expects nothing in return is contradictory to the covenant that he establishes through the finished work on Mt. Calvary. Yet there is an element of truth, even in apparent contradiction. (scripture is full of paradoxes: the trinity, the incarnation, the hypostatic union)

The answer to this riddle lies in us re-examining our idea of love. We need to recapture the erotic dimension of love. The idea of the erotic is more than just physical presence. It is the desire of the one to be with the other. At its core, any form of love is an expression of the erotic.

The desire to be in relationship with the other is at the core of what love is. This desire goes way beyond the merely sexual. The dance of two lovers transcends the carnal. Being with the one you love can mean more to those involved than just “physical gratification”. Anyone with a true experience of friendship understands that the desire to be with another is ingredient to our humanity. The same is true of agape. It’s not just that God gave, but that God gave in order that the world would be in a healthy relationship with its Creator. Thus eros is at the core of any understanding of the concept of love.

Philia, we are told by Aristotle in the Politics is the basis of community. It involves, by some necessity a practice of reciprocity. One party gives so that the other can receive and then give in return. The tie that binds us into community (in Koine Greek, koinonia) are ones based ultimately on our desire to be with each other. “They will know you are my disciples by your love for one another.” (John 13:35) In essence we as the Christian community are bound together by love and because of philia we have koinonia.

Something similar can be said of agape. Although the nature of this relationship is different, the goal is an affirming life-giving bond.

Since God exercises this act of love first, (God is the initiator of every relationship) agape is courageous, even and adventurous, expression of love. Paul tells us God's agape love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:8). This means that agape never gives up. As an expression of God's presence, love bathes us in affirmation. Love calls us to a richer, deeper, more satisfying experience of ourselves, God, and the world we inhabit. Prayer is one of the core ways we come into contact with that love. It is an integral part of what it means to be in relationship with God.

### **Pray Then in This Way**

We may wonder why the Lord's Prayer was fashioned this way. The rationale for the Lord's Prayer in Matthew can be found at the beginning of the chapter. Jesus says, "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1). This is a warning, if there was ever one, to stay alert and be mindful of what we are doing.

Although God always calls us to be in communion, like any relationship, we can take it for granted. All relationships need constant attention. Anyone who is in or has been in one knows this. And if we become inattentive to our relationships, they wither. The same can be said of our relationship with God.

We cannot sever our relationship with God entirely but we can diminish the depth of that relationship by merely going through the motions. This is the basis of the word hypocrite (Koine Grk. ὑποκριτής). At its core a hypocrite is an actor. She says the line and plays her role. We should not saddle the biblical term with all the baggage it has picked up over the years. Just because a person is doing what is expected of them- playing the right role at the right time. All of us play roles, You go to a dinner party because it is expected of employees. You attend the neighborhood picnic because not going would be unneighborly. As a father you go to recital; as a mother you go to practices. These are all good things. At other times however, we are just acting out our roles as it relates to our relationship with God.

When we act out of expectation we run the risk of not being fully engaged. This is because, primarily, we would rather be doing something else. This might describe how we feel sometimes, even during worship. Thus Jesus reminds us not to fall into this trap.

Also, when we act out of expectation we run the risk of just skimming the surface of our experience with God. Being in God's presence offers us so much that that going beyond mere expectation can open up possibilities that we have yet to imagine. How much can you gain from the experience? Only God really knows. Like the prophet Isaiah, we open ourselves to finding the true calling of our lives when we come into the presence of God.