

Matthew 6:9-13

New International Version	Holman Christian Standard Bible	English Standard Version	English Text Original Manuscript
<p>⁹“This, then, is how you should pray:</p> <p>““Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,</p> <p>¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.</p> <p>¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.</p> <p>¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.</p> <p>¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’</p>	<p>⁹“Therefore, you should pray like this:</p> <p>Our Father in heaven, Your name be honored as holy.</p> <p>¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.</p> <p>¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.</p> <p>¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.</p> <p>¹³ And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.</p> <p>[For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]</p>	<p>⁹ Pray then like this:</p> <p>“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.</p> <p>¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.</p> <p>¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,</p> <p>¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.</p> <p>¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.</p>	<p>Our Father in the heavens Make holy your name Bring your kingdom Bring about your will As in heaven also upon the earth Give us this day our daily bread And forgive us our debts As we have forgiven those Indebted to us And lead us not into temptation But deliver us from evil</p>

Let us look at the Lord's Prayer again to get a clear understanding of its structure:

Invocation "Our Father"
Rationale "in the heavens"
Petition "2 sets of 3 petitions"

The invocation and rationale are short, but as I said, the few words that are used already begins to form us into the vision God has for the world. In other words, before we can even ask God for anything, we need to orient ourselves to God's vision of who we are, what the world is about, and our many relationships with it. Once we commit ourselves and enter into God's vision we are then able to ask God for what is sorely missing or needs to be increased in our world and in our lives.

Hallowed be your name

That God wants us to live as members of a great community is stressed again in what is a series of three petitions. The first asks that God's name be hallowed, respected, and be holy (Matthew 6:9). In many ways, this petition should strike us as odd. Basically, it means that God's name is not recognized as holy. But who is responsible for this? What is interesting about how this petition is phrased is that it does not place responsibility on only one individual or group. It would be easy to say that human beings are the ones who keep God's name from being recognized as holy and leave it at that. However, because the Lord's Prayer calls us to understand ourselves as members of a community, the real intent of the request is more complicated. We as human beings are responsible for recognizing that individually and corporately, we neglect to give God the proper recognition and honor. And so, we take upon ourselves the responsibility of making sure God's name receives the reverence it deserves. At the same time, it asks God to become involved in the process as well. In other words, the petition commits each of us to doing our part in holding sacred God's name, but it also calls upon God to intervene to make sure that all creation gives God the honor God deserves.

This petition is complicated. To say, "Make holy your name" is to ask for God's activity. Even more, it places us at God's service. Yes, God acts; but we ask God to act upon us. It is a form of confession. In it we acknowledge that we have resisted our openness to the holiness that surrounds us. That is, God's name isn't recognized as holy because we- all of us!- fail to appreciate the extraordinary among the mundane.

Life is a gift from God. We say it but how often do we ignore or forget it. We have all been guilty at one time or another in our lives for taking life for granted. Sometimes we neglect our health and well-being to the point that we put our lives and many relationship we have in danger. The outcome is beautifully tragic.

The tragedy involved several surgeries and possibly long hospital stays. The beauty is that this dose of reality- our own mortality- awakens us from our sinful slumber. Why sinful? Sometimes we are so busy with our "God talk" that we neglect to experience and appreciate Him. Haughtiness is an insidious sin because it usually arises from an initial and genuine desire to be an instrument of God's activity. But just as there is a thin line between love and hate, there is an

equally thin line between humility and pride. The Gospel writer warns us without pulling punches, “Be careful of performing your piety in front of others in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your heavenly Father” (Matthew 6:1). What can begin as a reverencing of God’s name can, unfortunately, become a cult of personality that idolizes the vehicle to accomplish its task. We may be the salt of the earth, but what happens if -God forbid!- the salt loses its “saltiness?” (Matthew 5:13)

In the country one of the first questions they ask a new acquaintance is; “Who your people i’(s)”. The reason for this is because the individual asking wants to know what pedigree you come from. Or what sort of people do you descend from. The question in fact is very biblical. A name told you something very important about a person in the Bible.

Something very similar is true about how we represent the divine name. Do we exalt it or do we besmirch it? When we fail to appreciate our importance as human beings beloved by God called to be conduits of divine love- “the sacrament of the present,” as Jean-Pierre de Caussade called it- we do not live up to our pedigree as children of God. When we yield ourselves as instruments of God, then the past and its discouragements, as well as the future and its worries, vanish into the enjoyment of the reverence of the present. Thus, the first petition of the Lord’s Prayer calls us to be the transformative agents of a new identity- both ours and the world’s. “May your name be hallowed, O God, in the way we live our lives.”

Your kingdom come

The second petition follows from the first and expands upon it. What it tells us is that God’s power is exercised in God’s kingdom (Matthew 6:10). The concept of “the kingdom” another way to translate it would be “rule”- is complicated because in Jesus day people closely connected the dignity of the ruler with the extent of the territory that was ruled. What made an individual the legitimate king of a territory was that he had dignity or character to control it- the Romans called it *auctoritas*. So the extent of a person’s kingdom was directly tied to the perception of his dignity. This is how the second petition is like the first. Since God’s name is not holy, God’s legitimate rule is not universally evident.

The idea of God’s territory as God’s kingdom made sense to people in Jesus’ day. They had been told for hundred of years that one-person rule (that is, monarchy) was more efficient and , thus, superior to the rule of groups (that is, aristocracy) or the larger population (that is, democracy). When too many people are allowed to exercise authority, the greatest danger was that divisions would keep the government from operating smoothly. And honestly, this was their experience. Civil wars had devastated and divided the Roman empire. For a long time there were no clear lines of authority, and the real victims of these wars were the common people.

In their minds then, the greatest benefit to one-person rule was peace. Only when one person was clearly in charge could real social stability be possible. Until the king was firmly established, there could be no great golden age in which all human beings experience the fullness of their lives. And so, this petition asks that this golden age be brought into being. The fulfillment of this request would be the clear and widespread acknowledgement of God’s authority and right to govern all of creation, which would mean that human beings as a whole would also confess that

all power comes from and is established by God. To put it another way, this petition asks for God's complete victory over evil. Although it confesses that all creation has not come under God's control, it also expresses our commitment to do our part in expanding God's kingdom and our conviction that God will not tolerate injustice forever.

In this way, the Lord's Prayer also calls us to reflect upon the composition of God's kingdom. Kingdoms can be homogenous, made up of people who are all alike. Take, for example, the kingdom of Herod in the New Testament, which encompassed the land and the people of Judea. Although people other than Jews lived in this kingdom – one of them disputably being Herod – the clear majority of the population came from one ethnic group. By contrast, kingdoms and empires could also be diverse places composed of very different people with differing needs, desires, and backgrounds. This was the case with the Roman Empire. It encompassed Egyptians, Numidians, Lybians, Gauls, Celts, Jews, Romans, Phoenicians, Cyrenians and a host of others. The Romans dealt with the challenge of such diversity by imposing "order" (In Latin, *ordo*). Another way of understanding order would be law. Unfortunately, Roman law worked to the benefit of the Romans and to the detriment of everyone else. They had different laws for different ethnic groups, often with the goal in mind of keeping them divided. That is, the Romans governed their diverse empire by imposing a social structure on their subjects that is called "divide and rule."

As you may know from your own study of the New Testament, there were different types of citizenship in the Roman empire. We are told, for example that Paul was a Roman citizen. This status brought with it certain rights and privileges. Roman citizens were at the very top of the social pyramid. They could go anywhere they wished throughout the empire and receive protection from the government. The majority of people, however, were not so lucky. They were not wealthy enough to receive Roman citizenship. They could, however be citizens of specific cities (or kingdoms) within the empire boundaries. A person could be a citizen of Jerusalem or Alexandria, for example. This gave them certain rights and protections, but they were far more limited than those of Roman citizenship. In Egypt, for example, we know that the Romans bestowed citizenship upon people living in specific cities. Even these ethnic groups received special rights from the Romans. The Jews living outside of Judea and Galilee, for example, were often given special legal status that allowed them to govern their own communities. The Jews still living back in Judea were not so lucky.

At the bottom of the social ladder were people on whom the Romans bestowed no citizenship at all. These people had no real legal right in the eyes of the Romans. People at the bottom were the ones to be crucified, a painful and humiliating death, when they challenged the Roman system. And so, we begin to see that these various levels of citizenship and rights were a way of defining people and really determining their chances and opportunities. People classified simply as Egyptians, for example, were not allowed to serve in the Roman army in Jesus' day. Jews could, and citizens of Alexandria could, but not Egyptians. It was like an ancient version of Jim Crow or Apartheid. The select few prospered while the vast majority struggled for their very survival. It should not surprise us then that a widespread feeling of injustice permeated the lives of many.

God's kingdom, the Lord's Prayer tells us, is different. Instead of "divide and rule," the vision of God's kingdom (*basileia*) is one of "unite and rule." This part of what the apostle Paul means

when he says, “Jesus Christ has set you free from the law of sin and death” Romans 8:2. The power of the law, the Roman *ordo*, the very structures that the government uses to control individuals, has been broken with the coming of Jesus Christ. We are no longer forced to live under these death-dealing systems. What is more, we are no longer constrained to act in ways that promote the prosperity of the few and the poverty and misery of the many. Committing ourselves to God’s vision for the world means overturning these old structures and building new ones that bind us together in lasting peace.

It would be misleading for us to think that the peace that will accompany God’s kingdom means that any sort of force will be unnecessary. The establishment of God’s kingdom would mean that God’s authority will be recognized by all and that we all as human beings would be in just relationships with each other. The establishment of just relationships, at times however, requires that people be forced to change. As Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said poetically, “History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. And so, the coming of God’s kingdom means that the present power structures- the system that decides who gets what, when, and how- will be dismantled. This means that some people will have to give up their present privileges for the sake of His divine kingdom.

The Lord’s Prayer does not say exactly how this will be done, but it does provide us with some clues. Since a king reigns in places where his dignity is honored, the first place the kingdom must be established is in the thoughts, words, and deeds of human beings. The coming of God’s kingdom means not only recognizing God dignity and worthiness but also the establishment of a just and humane society. Again, like the petition regarding God’s name, this petition asks God to be active in bringing about the establishment of God’s kingdom. In this way the second petition builds upon the first. If human beings are not in the right relationship with God, because they fail to make God’s name holy, then they are likewise not in right relationship with each other because they do not behave in accordance with the kind of society God envisions.

The kingdom becomes an Exodus movement, a time when the people of God reclaim their identity as a people of positive transformation. The advent of God’s kingdom is a call to a wager of faith by the children of God. We must throw off the shackles of false security for the courageous adventure that is faith. As N.T. Wright once proclaimed, “Most revolutions breed new tyrannies; not this one. This is the Father’s revolution.”

**Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven**

The third petition amplifies the first two even further. The first petition asks that God’s proper place be acknowledged. The second petition asks the outcome of acknowledging God’s proper place would result in the establishment of a just society. The third petition focuses its attention squarely upon human beings. The phrase “as in heaven also upon [the] earth” highlights that it is not the earth, but what is upon the earth, that opposes the will of God. In short, human beings- who do not reverence God’s name and do not live according to God’s vision- are in rebellion against their Creator. This, the Lord’s Prayer says, is real source of sin. Our individual wills are

pitted against God's will. Unlike the rest of the universe, which submits itself to the will of God, human beings disrupt the healthy functioning of this universal household. This may be why many early Christians made a connection between this petition and Jesus' statement in Gethsemane where he says not my will but your will be done (Matthew 26:36-46). In the cosmic household the will of the Father must be obeyed, if the household is to function properly. Asking that God's will be done means committing ourselves daily to the task of building a new social order.

The social order can mean accepting some inconvenient truths about our existence. God made us as human beings and acknowledging the fullness of that can lead us to the verge of despair, if not at times, rebellion. This may be seen in our relationship to mortality and prayers for healing. If there is any place where our wills may challenge the divine one, then our desire to orchestrate death may be the most enlightening.

Prayer cannot eliminate our mortality. Put another way: immortality is not one of the possibilities we encounter in this world. Moreover, we far too often act as if our mortality were a fable in which the worst possible outcome would be to die a centenarian in your sleep. Several of my cousins never saw thirty. A dear friend of mine committed suicide due to the pressures of pastoring. Another friend of mine died at the funeral home he worked at in his forties just inches away from the morgue. Another friend of mine died at the buffet with my friend who died at the funeral home present a year earlier. I could go on and on, but the point is the same; mortality is an integral part of the fabric of being. This makes it an important even a difficult, part of the will of God.

One preacher asks, "why pray for the sick if we are going to die anyhow?" I don't have an answer yet I can state that healing is a process that involves much more than the body. This may explain why an individual can experience a miraculous physical restoration and still fall into deep depression. Fixing the physical infirmity is just part of the healing.

What prayer for healing does other than curing the physical infirmity does is encourages and strengthens us spiritually and psychologically so that if God chooses to heal the infirmity in our bodies we are ready to receive that healing. All healing comes from God according to His will. I am a firm believer if you can have it God can heal it. God is able to heal all manner of disease. There is also a healing that goes beyond death. Mortality is a constant threat, but merely fixing the ills of the body is not a holistic understanding of healing. Nevertheless, standing by the bedside of the infirmed, physical restoration is at the tops of our lists of petitions.

Why pray when mortality is woven into the very fabric of human existence? God bids us to do it. Human knowledge is always a limited knowledge. No one outside of God knows when an illness has crossed the threshold from reversible to irreversible. Thus, our prayers for healing are poised to make a difference. They can lure the sick from death to life. In our prayers for healing we encounter most profoundly the fragility and resiliency of life.

"I came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly," says Jesus (John 10:10). Our prayers for healing should not only be directed at infirmed individuals. They should be directed at our families, our communities, the environment- all forms of life! Since we live in an

interconnected universe, our prayers for healing echo our petition for God's will to be done. Illness or dis-ease are just metaphors for the disruptive intrusion that interferes with the abundance that is life. Mortality is definitely a necessary, if not tragic, part of life.

Asking that God's will be done is to request a social arrangement that promotes the flourishing of life. It is to ask God to heal, with our assistance, the daunting ills that infect our social body like other prayers for healing seek to restore our individual bodies. In short, the third petition points us toward a divine vision that sees life as an expansive flourishing- a vision that can be rendered limiting or death-dealing, if not tempered with a strong desire for healing. Healing is the key to the establishment of God's will.

Looking back over these three petitions, we can call them things God needs. But they are not needs in the same way that human needs are outlined in the following three petitions. The human needs spelled out in the following verses are fundamental to human survival and growth. God's needs, by contrast, are about creating an environment in which God's vision can become a reality. God's desire is that God's creation experience the fullness of what it means to be in relationship with the Creator. To do this, certain ways of living must be adopted by those of us who are called to be agents of God in the world. And so, an overly simplistic way of understanding God's needs is that these are the things God needs from us for God's vision to become reality in our lives. At the same time, we should not overlook the fact that we are asking God to assist in this process as well. We, as human beings, can stray from God's vision, and so we ask God to assist us in our commitment to maintain it. Even more, the reality of evil is that we need God's continued assistance in order to confront and overcome this pervasive foe.