

Introduction:

The Bible says a lot about prayer. However, would you agree that when we have a Bible passage in which Jesus Himself says, “Pray then like this,” maybe—just maybe—that would be a good place to start? That is exactly what we find in **Matthew 6:9**—a good place to start.

Discussion:

I. “Pray then like this...”: Two mistakes.

A. *Mistake #1: We are prohibited from reciting this prayer.*

1. When Jesus says, “Pray then like this,” or as we find in **Luke 11:2**, “When you pray, say...” how could we possibly claim it is wrong to pray the actual words, phrases, praises, and requests of this prayer? How can we claim it is wrong to recite them verbatim? Brothers and sisters, please, think about how silly it is to claim we can pray like this prayer, but not too much like this prayer, not exactly like this prayer.
2. No, we don’t want this prayer to become rote or merely ritualistic any more than we want any other prayer to do so. However, if someone wants to recite this prayer, they can. If we wanted to chant it together, we can. If we want to write a melody and some harmony and sing this prayer together, we can.

B. *Mistake #2: We are required to recite this prayer.*

1. However, Jesus does not require us to recite this prayer verbatim. The Bible is full of numerous other prayers. Jesus prayed different prayers (see **Matthew 26:39; John 17**).
2. It is not a sin to pray the model, but understand that is what it is. It is a model. It’s a place to start. And perhaps, if you are not at all familiar with prayer, that is what you do, you start by praying the model. You pray it again and again. As you pray it, you start to grasp what it means and what it is asking of you. You move to praying the same thing but using different words. You recognize how the prayer models other praise and requests and you bring those into your praying. As you grow in prayer, you may find you never recite this prayer again, but when you are done, you are still praying like this.

II. “Pray then like this...”: In contrast to what?

A. *Contrast #1: Don’t pray like the hypocrites (Matthew 6:1,5):* Some folks pray the words, “Our Father in heaven,” but are actually praying to impress the people around them. That is hypocrisy. Don’t pray like that.

B. *Contrast #2: Don’t pray like the Gentiles (Matthew 6:7-8):*

1. Some folks pray the same thing over and over and over again thinking that is how to get God to hear them. Jesus says we shouldn’t pray like this because unlike the pagan gods, our God already knows what we need. But wait! If God already knows what we need, shouldn’t Jesus just claim we don’t need to pray at all? What’s going on here? To find out, jump down to the conclusion of Jesus’s teaching on anxiety and notice a parallel statement: “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat? Or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (**Matthew 6:31-33**, ESV). Jesus says we don’t get what we need by anxiously seeking our needs like the Gentiles do, but by seeking first God’s kingdom. In like manner, we don’t get what we need by praying like the Gentiles do. How do we get our needs then? By seeking the kingdom first in our praying.
2. Jesus isn’t saying, “Start with praise, then make requests, and make sure you pray for spiritual things as much as physical.” Jesus isn’t giving us an acrostic or a mnemonic to organize our prayers. Jesus is telling us to pray Kingdom First Prayers.

III. “Pray then like this...”: A Kingdom First Prayer.

A. *The first three requests (Matthew 6:9-10):*

1. The first half of this model prayer is three requests all rolled into one sentence. We may miss this in the ESV, but consider the American Literary Version, Bibliotheca Edition which preserves and clarifies the parallel nature of the first three requests. “Our Father in the heavens, your name be hallowed, your kingdom come, your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth.”

2. Does this surprise us in a Kingdom First Prayer? What do we pray for first? The King and His Kingdom. Our prayer doesn't begin with, "Lord, make me famous. Lord, spread my influence. Lord, do what I want." No, no. Our prayer begins with, "Lord, make Your name famous. Spread your rule. Get everyone to do what You want." That is Kingdom First Praying.
3. But notice the final modifier. "As in heaven, so on earth." "Lord, don't just have a few people hallow Your name on earth. Have Your name hallowed by everyone and everything on earth just like it is in heaven." "Lord, don't just establish Your kingdom on earth. Fill the earth with Your kingdom just like it fills heaven." "Lord, don't just tell us about Your will and don't just get a few people to do Your will, fill the earth with those who do Your will just like heaven is full of those who do Your will."

B. *The last three requests (Matthew 6:11-13):*

1. *Give us this day our daily bread:*
  - a) Jesus adapted this prayer from **Proverbs 30:7-9**. In that passage, Agur (see **Proverbs 30:1**) prays God will "give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me." That is, "Give me just enough, Lord." Why does Agur pray this? Because he has a concern that is more fundamental than how much food he has. His fundamental concern is the Lord's glory. If God gives him too much, he'll start thinking money is his security and safety. He'll deny the Lord. However, if he doesn't have enough, the temptation to steal will be too great and he'll profane the Lord's name.
  - b) In other words, this is another way of saying "Our Father in heaven, Your name must be hallowed on earth as it is in heaven." But it is also saying, "Start with me. Give me enough, and help me be satisfied if you give me no more than that, because the honoring of Your name needs to begin with me."
  - c) What does this request model for our praying? **Kingdom motivation**. When you pray, why do you want what you ask for? Why do you want the food you ask for? Why do you want to get married? Why do you want your spouse or children to act a certain way or experience a certain thing? Why do you want that job or that job promotion? Why do you want to be healed from that sickness? Why do you want that new house or new car or new whatever? Do you want these things because they will make your life more comfortable? Because they will give you peace? ...leisure? ...pleasure? ...convenience? Or do you want them because that is what will hallow, honor, and sanctify the name of God?
2. *Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors:*
  - a) What a beautiful prayer, isn't it? Aren't we so glad that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins? (**1 John 1:9**) But is this just about making sure we ask for forgiveness? Did you catch the modifier on this one? It is not "forgive us our debts as we confess them to you." It is not "forgive us our debts as we quit incurring those debts." It is not even "forgive us our debts so we can go to heaven." It is "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."
  - b) Grasp what Jesus says here. This request is not about making sure we receive forgiveness. It is actually about making sure we become forgivers. When is the last time you prayed, "Lord, forgive me for \_\_\_\_\_, but only to the degree and in the way that I forgive my wife, my husband, my kids, my dad, my mom, my neighbor, my enemy, my co-worker, my siblings, my brothers and sisters in Jesus...?" "Forgive me for lying, but only in the way that I forgive those who have lied to me." "Forgive me for gossiping and slandering, but only to the degree I forgive those who gossip about and slander me." "Forgive me for stealing, but only to the degree I forgive those who steal from me."
  - c) In other words, this is another way of praying, "Our Father in heaven, Your kingdom must come on earth as it is in heaven." But it is also saying, "Start with me. Rule my life. Reign in my heart. Govern my actions."
  - d) What does this request model for our praying? **Kingdom submission**. Jesus wasn't saying, "Don't forget to pray about spiritual needs too." The question is do we even understand what our spiritual needs are? We want forgiveness, but as a means to what end? Do we want forgiveness so we can keep on sinning but go to heaven anyway? That isn't kingdom submission. That isn't kingdom living and kingdom seeking. Forgiveness is supposed to change us. It is supposed to empower us. Yes, God forgives us in order to save us, but that salvation is not simply "going to heaven" when we die. That salvation is being healed from the corruption of our sins so we are free to live in God's holiness. That forgiveness ushers us into the kingdom so we can grow to behave like our King.
3. *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:*
  - a) The request for God not to lead us into temptation raises questions. Why would Jesus tell us to pray for God not to do something we are certain He wouldn't do anyway? I admit, I don't fully know why

Jesus worded it this way. But I think we can get at the gist of Jesus's model request without knowing the ins and outs of Jesus's word choice. Consider what this request as worded actually demonstrates.

- (1) First, this request demonstrates an underlying commitment. "Lord, I'm following Your lead. I'm going wherever You take me." That's a kingdom first commitment, isn't it?
  - (2) Second, this request demonstrates an underlying desire. "Lord, I don't want to do wrong. I want to do right." That's a kingdom first desire, isn't it?
  - (3) Third, this request demonstrates an underlying concern. "Lord, if You don't lead me in Your paths, I'm going to wander off." That's a kingdom first concern, isn't it?
- b) Do you recall what James says about temptation? "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire" (**James 1:14**, ESV). When I recognize this, I realize Jesus's model request is actually asking God to take over my desires. "Grow me to want what You want, Lord!"
  - c) In other words, this is another way of praying, "Our Father in heaven, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." But it is also saying, "Start with me. I surrender my life. I surrender my will. Your will be done in me as it is in heaven."
  - d) What does this request model for our praying? **Kingdom purpose**. This request encompasses the entire goal of prayer. The goal of prayer is not getting God to do what we want. That is why the Gentiles multiply their meaningless repetitions. No the goal of prayer is getting us to want and do what God wants. The only path to get there is through a kingdom first kind of praying.
- C. Having walked through the requests, I hope we have discovered something. Kingdom First Praying doesn't mean pray about the kingdom first and then move on to everything else anymore than Kingdom First Living means start your day with kingdom stuff and then move on to whatever else you want to do after that. Kingdom First Praying means our praying is about the kingdom. It means every praise, every confession, every thanksgiving, every request, every intercession is anchored in seeking God's kingdom, God's rule, God's reign, God's righteousness. It means recognizing that when God and prayer are just tools to get what we want, we actually have another master and king. That is how the pagans pray and view their gods. Kingdom First Praying is the means for us to want what God wants. Pagan praying is the attempt to bend God to our will, Kingdom First Praying is the means to bend us to God's.

#### Conclusion:

Some translations conclude this model prayer with the sentence, "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever, Amen." There are apparently good reasons why some of the more recent translations have dropped this sentence. Frankly, it is above my paygrade to know whether this sentence was really part of Matthew's original work or not. Either way, **1 Chronicles 29:10-13** demonstrates it is a perfectly wonderful sentiment to include in our praying. In fact, it expresses the basis for why our praying needs to be Kingdom First Praying. The kingdom, the power, the glory do not belong to us. They belong to God. Therefore, we have no need to be anxious. We need simply seek God's kingdom first; He'll take care of the rest. We have no need to try to be manipulative in our praying. We need simply to pray God's kingdom first; He already knows what we need. He'll take care of the rest. This leaves us with a question. What's first in your praying?