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Matthew 6:5–6,9-15, ESV.

⁵ *“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

⁹ *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.*

¹⁴ *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Luke 11:1–4, ESV.

11 *Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” ² And he said to them, “When you pray, say:*

*“Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.*

³ *Give us each day our daily bread,*

⁴ *and forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And lead us not into temptation.”*

Deliver us from evil.

The Lord’s Prayer, as it has become known, from the Gospel of Matthew, is the most widely memorized and recited scriptural passage among Christians. The Eastern Catholic Church, probably in the 1st or 2nd century, added a doxology at the end, something that we do not find in the Bible: *For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.* Protestants adopted this verse after the Reformation. There is a briefer version of this prayer in the Gospel of Luke:

*“Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
³ Give us each day our daily bread,
⁴ and forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
And lead us not into temptation.”*

There are differences between the version we find in the Gospel of Matthew and the version in the Gospel of Luke, but this isn’t because one (or both) must be wrong: it has to do with context. The Gospel of Matthew version appears in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ longest documented words of preaching. Jesus is teaching his followers how to be pious, how to stay connected to God all the time. Luke’s version was a quick answer to a handful of his disciples, not something

delivered in a formal fashion to a multitude. Clearly, the two quotes were delivered at different times in different contexts, and Luke was not referencing the same event as Matthew. There is debate about whether the Lord's Prayer was meant to be taken literally, with us asking God to take care of us today, here on Earth, to give us bread each day, to forgive us when we sin on Earth, and to protect us from coming to harm – or if it was intended as a request for eternal protection. The word that is used in Greek for “daily” in “daily bread”, *epiousion*, is not a common biblical Greek word, and its meaning isn't really known; it might mean “for tomorrow”. In fact, there is very little chance that the word was ever meant to mean “daily” or “for today”. We must read this as both a request for blessing and protection today, and for spiritual guidance and grace for all of eternity.

There is a prayer, often sung, called the *Kaddish*, and it is used in Jewish liturgies: it is quite reminiscent of the Lord's Prayer. The Kaddish is traditionally said in Aramaic, which is related to Hebrew; it was the native language of Jesus. When he gave his Sermon on the Mount, he spoke in Aramaic, but the Gospels were recorded in Greek. The Kaddish might predate the Gospel of Matthew; versions of it are at least as old as the first century A.D. But one thing is certain: this form of prayer comes from the roots of Jesus' faith as a Jew. We imagine Jesus, who often in the Gospels went to pray alone, praying these words himself.

In Latin Catholic services, the Lord's Prayer was known as the *Pater Noster*, which means "Our Father". Let's look at the Lord's Prayer, what I, as a Catholic Boy, knew as the Our Father. We'll step through it, verse by verse.

*"Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.*

The first part of this makes sense: God is holy, and so we treat the name of God with respect. But what about "Your kingdom come", which means "Let your kingdom come to be". Remember that the people of Jesus' day lived in a chaotic world that they could not control. Invaders, along with their kingdoms, came and went. This verse does not refer to Heaven. We are not praying that one day, God will take us to live with him forever. This verse from the Lord's Prayer is simply a straightforward, ancient Jewish way of asking that one day, God will indeed rule all people – here on Earth. We are asking for a global rule of God. Remember that Jesus had not yet been crucified. The Jews are waiting for a Messiah. Rome is simply the latest, brutal colonial empire. This prayer is a request, stated by Jesus, that God finish the job of claiming all the earth as his kingdom. Most importantly, unlike human kingdoms, God's will be righteous, kind, and yes, eternal. But the eternal part was not their focus. They were concerned with life on this planet.

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

This is another point of confusion – an important one. This does not refer to the afterlife, paradise, the place we all go to when we pass away. The word in Greek in the Gospel is *Ourano*, and it means “the heavens”, the rest of the universe, all that existed beyond what the ancients could see. We are praying that God’s laws will control not just the place where we are standing, where we live, but the entire world and everything up there, of which we, in ancient times, had very little idea.

¹¹ *Give us this day our daily bread,*

In the Book of Acts we learn about a daily distribution of food for widows. These people lived off the land. They did not have a long-term food supply chain. They were dependent upon God to provide an environment on Earth that allowed them to grow and find food. But it’s also true that these same people had in their history the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, with no food, and with God mysteriously feeding them manna. In fact, they are told to collect this manna every day, and not to fall to the temptation to stockpile it for the future. The purpose is to show their total dependence on and faith in God to provide for them. This part of the prayer asks God to continue to do this, to take care of us every day – yes, daily. We only look at one day at a time because we trust God completely. This line is a request for food, for care, but it is also a statement of trust and faith.

¹² *and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

Some people say forgive us our trespasses or forgive us our sins. So, which of these are we praying for forgiveness of: debts, trespasses, or sins? The best definition we could put on the Greek word, which is *opheilēmata*, and which appears in the Gospel of Matthew is a “moral debt”. Jesus deliberately chose a financial sounding word to refer to our indebtedness to God when we do wrong. It gave a tangible, gritty meaning to moral failure. Precisely, what we are asking for in this verse when we pray it, is not for salvation: we get salvation simply by believing. We’re asking for the daily dismissal of the debt to God that we incur when we do the many little - and occasional big - things we know we should not do.

And what about forgiving our debtors? This is frequently misinterpreted. It might seem that the meaning is this: since we have been forgiven by God, we will turn around, and inspired by God’s grace, forgive others for what they have done against us. But this is not what the original Greek literally implies. What the prayer says in Greek is this: *God forgives us, just as we have forgiven others*. So, it’s the other way around than what we might think: God forgives us just as we forgive others. Another way of looking at it is this: if we harden our hearts to the point where we are unwilling to forgive, when we won’t be capable of accepting God’s unearned forgiveness. Don’t forget what comes right after the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew. It is very clear about the need to be forgiving if we expect to be forgiven:

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

*¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.*

This is a particularly intriguing line. God does indeed let us, throughout our lives, be tempted. We seem to be asking God to stop doing this. But really, what we are praying for here is for God to not lead us into temptation – and then abandon us. We ask to be delivered from evil. God, yes, we know that you are going to allow us, over and over and over, in our lives be tempted to do things that we absolutely should not do. But what we ask of you is that when this happens, you stay with us, you get us through it. You let us feel your presence and deliver us to the other side.

A few years ago, Wendy and I were driving back into Boulder from Denver. Ahead of us was a side-dump trailer that was flying downhill into Boulder on the highway far too fast. The driver took a right turn on a side street, lost control, and the truck tipped over on its side, dumping the entire huge load of sand onto a car that had been traveling in the opposite direction on this side street. The car was completely buried. It was in the middle of a workday, and the accident of course stopped all traffic. Immediately, people jumped into action. Folks began pounding on the doors of nearby houses, getting shovels. By the time the fire department

got there, there were a dozen people standing on the mountain of sand, madly shoveling away at it. At one place, there was a very narrow tunnel of air leading to the undercarriage of the car. I laid down on my belly and shouted out; the driver heard me and said that he was alone in the car and that he had managed to throw himself down on the driver's floor. He said he was hanging in there. I was impressed at his calm and his courage. It was over an hour before he was dug out of the crushed car and put in an ambulance. He was scratched up, but he was okay.

I thought of this story as I was writing this message because none of us know when we will need rescuing physically, or medically, or spiritually. The Lord's Prayer is a request of God to look after us in all ways.

*"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.*

God, we pray that one day you will rule over this entire planet, over every human, over all that lives and does not live, everything in existence. May the day come when we feel secure knowing that you are absolutely in charge. All will bend to

your will, in the world we see around us, and in the world far beyond what we can comprehend. In the meantime, we trust you to provide for us, to see to it that we are fed and housed every day, that our loved ones are cared for, and that our physical needs will always be met. We do forgive others when they wrong us. We know that you honor our acts of forgiveness by always forgiving us, and that your forgiveness has no bounds. We know that in this world we will face temptation, that we will find ourselves surrounded by evil that threatens to wrap itself around us and destroy us morally. But we know that no matter how poisoned the world around us becomes, you will always be there to see us through every moral threat.

As that man who had been buried alive under a hill of sand was rolled away on a gurney, and just before he was slid into the ambulance, he sat up and weakly lifted a hand to all those who were watching. The rescuers applauded. The Lord's prayer is a request for both physical and spiritual protection. All of us, many times in our lives, will find ourselves buried alive – and only God can grab a shovel and dig us out. Please pray briefly with me.

God, we praise you, we thank you, we bless you for being in our lives, for making our walk on Earth an experience that is always shared with you. For yours is indeed the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.