

Nine Expository Articles
On
THE MODEL PRAYER

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Lord, Teach Us To Pray

On more than one occasion during the life of Christ, the Master Teacher offered a model prayer after which His disciple's prayers should be molded. Perhaps the most well-known occasion on which Jesus gave such instruction was during the exhortation commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount – the apostle Matthew records this instance in Matthew 6:9-13. At another time and circumstance, as seen Luke chapter 11, Jesus taught a very similar model prayer, not while speaking to a multitude of followers, but when His disciples approached Him with this request:

“Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1).

Jesus responded to this request with almost the exact same prayer found in Matthew 6, a prayer that many people have committed to memory. One important concept we should gain from this scene in Luke is that prayer is a learned part of worship. Just as the disciples of Jesus had to learn to pray, prayer is something that every child of God must learn to do by gaining instruction from God's word.

The Psalmist begins Psalm 19 with this declaration: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork.” Many years after this Psalm was written, the apostle Paul instructed the saints of God in Rome that “since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1:20). Passages like these teach that man can reason the existence of God simply by observing the evidence of His power and awesome might displayed in the universe. Upon regarding the natural world and its wonders, one might reason that there is a supreme being, a God who created all things and put all things in motion. And upon that logical reasoning, one might very well desire to communicate with God. However, Luke 11 makes it evident that man cannot learn how to address and communicate with God, how to pray, just by studying nature. Furthermore, some people claim that prayer is an inherited ability, a talent that a person is either born with or not. Others think that prayer can be offered to God in any form that seems right, with any attitude and just any words. If these opinions were correct, what would be the need for instruction in prayer? Luke 11 certainly implies that no one is born with natural knowledge and ability to pray, and that men and women have no right to pray in just any way that seems best to them. Jesus teaches that His disciples must be taught to pray in accordance with God's will.

The question then that all children of God must answer is how do we learn to pray such that our prayers and petitions are acceptable to God? Clearly, the first step is to study and understand passages like Luke 11:1-4 and Matthew 6:5-15, where Jesus Himself gives a model for our prayers. Notice that we are to pray “in this manner,” molding our petitions by Christ's example, but not vainly repeating these exact words. There are other example prayers in the Bible: the books of the Old Testament, specifically the Psalms, are filled with prayers offered to God by righteous men and women (e.g. I Sam. 2:1-10; II Chron. 6:12-42; Jer. 32:16-25). Moreover, on many occasions in the New Testament, the inspired writers actually record some of their prayers (e.g. John 17; Acts 4:24-31; Heb. 13:20,21) – be on the lookout for such passages while reading the Bible, and use these prayers as models, as well. Additionally, there are many passages in Scripture that give commands specifically pertaining to how Christian's should pray, as well as what to pray for. Consider, for example, Colossians 4:2-6, James 1:5-8, and I Timothy 2:1-7. By diligently studying these passages and others like them, and by striving to mold our prayers

by these divine instructions, we can learn to pray as God would have us do. We must not be ignorant: effective prayer is at the very heart of our relationship with God, and we must learn to pray in a way that is acceptable to our Father.

Prayer Begins With Praise

In the prayer that Jesus teaches as a model in Matthew 6, our Savior begins by praying: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” The word *hallowed* means made holy, sanctified, entirely the opposite of common. By addressing God the Father in this way, Jesus teaches His disciples that good prayer begins with recognition of who God is, His majesty and sanctity – in short, prayer should begin with praise. It’s a wonderful blessing that God gives us an avenue by which we can make our needs, concerns, and thanksgiving known to Him, but children of God need to remember that we are not to take this privilege for granted – we should approach God in humility, praising and magnifying Him as our Holy Father and Almighty Creator.

So often in the Psalms the psalmist approaches Jehovah in terms of reverence and praise, sometimes devoting entire prayers simply to glorify the majesty of God. For instance, Psalm 104 is a prayer of praise to God for His sovereignty and power in creation. In Psalm 104, verses 1 and 2, the psalmist declares:

Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty. Who cover Yourself with light as with a garment, who stretch out the heavens like a curtain.

We see this same pattern of praise in many prayers of the Bible. For example, consider the prayer of Hannah in I Samuel 2, when she dedicates her son to the Lord’s service:

My heart rejoices in the Lord...No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God.

Regard the prayer of Daniel in Daniel 9:4, when the prophet prays for deliverance from captivity and the restoration of Jerusalem:

O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, we have sinned and committed iniquity...

These prayers of the Old Testament, and others like them, are written for our learning (Romans 15:4). When we pray to our Father, we do not approach Him as equals, but as reverent children, penitently seeking forgiveness for the sins that stand between us and Him. In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus teaches an illustration contrasting a Pharisee who exalted himself in prayer, and a tax collector who humbled himself before God and begged for forgiveness. The Pharisee was not justified because he refused to humble himself, even praying with his face toward Heaven, showing no reverence or awe before the Lord. However, our attitude in prayer should imitate that of the tax collector, drawing a distinction between our lowly mortal state and the lofty grandeur of God.

In view of our lowliness and God’s righteousness, we need not neglect to praise God in our prayers. Jesus leaves an example that we should do so. The Psalms and other prayers in the Bible are written for our guidance. When we pray, we should recognize God’s wondrous power, and affirm our frailty and dependence on His strength and care.

Engaging The Heart In Prayer

In Matthew 6:9-13, Jesus teaches the multitudes a model prayer, beginning with these words: “In this manner, therefore, pray...” Notice, the word *therefore* indicates that the following teaching is based upon preceding instructions, namely, the verses in which Jesus states:

“And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you need before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:7-8).

Evidently, the Gentiles (or heathen peoples), acknowledging their logical belief in the divine creation of the universe, wanted their prayers to be heard by the powerful gods of the heavens, but these petitions were vain because: 1) they were ignorant concerning the nature of the one true and living God, as well as *how* to pray to Him; and 2) they mistook the power of prayer to be in the formula of words, instead of in the heart and attitude of the person praying. Their ignorance of how to communicate with God led them to mindlessly pray with vain repetitions that meant nothing to their true Creator.

Children of God gain several important lessons from these brief comments. First of all, clearly, Christians should not be ignorant concerning how to pray to the Father. The command in Matthew 6:7-8 implies that God absolutely does not accept just any words that are murmured toward the heavens. And thus, Jesus goes on to give His disciples a pattern, an example – not a ritualistic saying to substitute for our own heartfelt and meaningful supplications, but a model by which our prayers should be molded (just as verse 9 of Matthew 6 teaches that disciples should pray *in this manner*). Many individuals and religious groups have arrived at false conclusions concerning the model prayer of Matthew 6 and Luke 11. Jesus never intended for this model to be repeated word for word as a liturgy or religious ritual. In fact, He strictly commands against using such vain and mindless repetitions in prayer. This principle stands not only for verbatim recitation of the model prayer itself, but also for all other types of recitations which are droned in religious rituals – Jesus here condemns liturgies or formulaic recitations of any kind.

But secondly, and probably most importantly, Christ teaches in this passage that the power of prayer lies, not in complex or elegant formulas of words, but in the attitude and disposition of the one praying. Certainly, our prayers must be in accordance with the instructions given in God’s revealed word. However, one might offer a beautiful prayer, with all clauses in absolute accordance with the exemplary prayers of the Bible, but if he or she does not speak from a lovingly devoted and humbly submissive heart, those words will not reach God. Constantly in Scripture, God’s children are reminded that our Father cares most of all about the condition of the hearts of those who worship Him. For example, one might not have a lovely singing voice by this world’s standards, but if he strives to make melody in his heart to the Lord, and to encourage and edify his brethren in truthful song, then his worship is acceptable to God (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). One might not have the resources to offer large sums of money in the weekly collection, but if she cheerfully offers to God of her means as she has purposed in her heart, He sees not the quantity of capital but the quality of character expressed in that contribution (II Corinthians 9:7; cf. Mark 12:41-44). Truly, the same principle applies to the prayers we offer: God, who knows the things we need before we ask, seeks for His children to humbly bow their hearts before Him in earnest and devoted prayer, no matter how inadequate our vocabularies might seem.

As important as it is for our prayers to be offered in accordance with truth, it is equally important they be offered in spirit, as though we are kneeling before the very throne of the Lord (John 4:24). There is no mystical power in reciting this model prayer of the Christ. Indeed,

mindless, mechanical repetition of any prayer, or even of a particular phrase in prayer, means nothing to God. But our Father in Heaven, as noted here in the words of our Savior, desires for His children to express their thanksgiving and concerns in prayer offered from hearts full of devoted love, and elation that we stand in the mercy and grace of the Most High.

Calling God “Our Father”

At the beginning of Jesus’ model prayer found in Matthew 6 and Luke 11, the Christ teaches His disciples how to address God in prayer, beginning by saying: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” This statement teaches that if we wish to pray to the Lord and be heard by Him, we must be able to call upon God as our Father – that is, we must be children of God. There is a sense in which all mankind shares a relationship with God as Father in that He created us and He sustains us. In Acts 17, Paul speaks to the philosophers in Athens, and teaches that God gives “to all life, breath, and all things,” and since in God “we live and move and have our very being,” all people are God’s offspring (Acts 17:25,28). However, in the model prayer, Jesus does not speak concerning this generic sense in which God is our Father Creator, but throughout the gospels Christ emphasizes the extraordinarily intimate relationship which His true disciples share with their caring, personal God. In the Sermon on the Mount alone, Jesus uses the appellation *Father* no less than 17 times to describe God as a divine parent who rewards godliness, sees our hearts and secret thoughts, hears our prayerful petitions, and not only cares for His children, but provides our every need if we will but seek Him above all else.

Citizens of the Kingdom refer to God as their Father. This is a relationship made possible, yet not wholly secured by belief in Jesus as the Son of God (John 1:12-13). It is a relationship that requires, upon that prerequisite belief, a spiritual rebirth as a new creature in Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). It is a marvelous relationship entered into when one is baptized into Jesus Christ, perfecting faith with humble obedience: “²⁶For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27). Notice that verse 27 of Galatians 3 begins with the word *for*, giving a reason or cause for the relationship described in verse 26. In other words, we are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus because we were baptized into Christ. Thus, though the invitation to join this wonderful family goes out to all the world, we do not call on God as our Father in the communal sense in which the whole world shares God as Creator and Sustainer of life, but in the most personal and intimate sense of the word – a relationship only existing between God and the saved.

Our prayers as children of God should begin by addressing God, in reverence and humility, as our Father, enjoying all the privileges and responsibilities that this wonderful relationship entails. Calling upon God as our Father is not just a term of endearment, but an indication of a relationship that should dictate our entire way of life. Realizing this closeness shared with God, Christians should live their lives worthy of the call to sonship. This principle is clearly seen in Matthew 5-7, where Jesus teaches that, because God is our Father, we should live as lights in the world (5:16), love our enemies (5:44f), abound in charitable deeds (6:1,4), forgive the trespasses of our fellow men (6:15), and so on. As physical sons often bear resemblance to their earthly fathers, all children of the Most High God must resemble their spiritual Father by learning to ever do His will: “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children” (Ephesians 5:1). Paul

reiterates this teaching in II Corinthians 6:16-18, declaring that Christians are called out from the world and separated unto holiness as sons and daughters of God. These responsibilities, however, are far outweighed by the abundant blessings of the Lord, promised to his faithful children. Our fears and concerns for physical sustenance should be assuaged, knowing that God knows the things we need and is profoundly concerned to provide for us (Matthew 6:31ff; II Corinthians 9:8). Furthermore, as God's children in Christ, we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places – forgiveness of our sins, the riches of God's mercy and grace, and the promise of a reward far beyond all imagination that awaits us in heaven, where we will dwell in the light of God forever (Ephesians 1:3-14). As the apostle John exclaimed in I John 3:1, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"

Your Kingdom Come

Many groups and individuals in the religious world have formed false conclusions about the meaning and purpose of Christ's model prayer found in Matthew 6 and Luke 11. This misunderstanding is evident by the frequent repetition of this prayer, word for word, in religious ceremonies and services. Conversely, as seen in Matthew 6:7, vain repetition was one of the practices that Jesus specifically taught against, a display of ignorance that in fact motivated Him to teach the model prayer of Matthew 6 to begin with. Furthermore, it is still clearer that Christ did not intend this prayer to substitute for our own worshipful petitions by a phrase used both in Matthew 6 and Luke 11 that no longer holds the meaning it did when spoken by Jesus nearly 2000 years ago, that is, the petition for the coming of the kingdom – "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10).

In Matthew 3, John the Baptist fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of the "voice crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord" (3:3). John preached a message of repentance, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" – he told the penitent Jews that the promised kingdom was so close they could almost reach out and touch it (Matthew 3:2). John's ministry was only to prepare for Jesus the Messiah, and He further taught the coming of the kingdom (Matthew 9:35). Christ taught that the kingdom of God would not be an earthly kingdom with physical armies and a warrior King, but would be a spiritual kingdom, alive and thriving in the hearts of His believing, obedient disciples (Luke 17:20-21; John 18:36). Therefore, Jesus taught His disciples, as we read in the model prayer, that upon hearing that gospel of the coming kingdom, they should pray for its arrival. However, when Jesus Christ died on the cross and God raised Him from the dead and but a brief time later He ascended into heaven, the apostles taught that He was raised to sit on the eternal throne of David (Acts 2:30-31; cf. II Samuel 7:13). On that first day of Pentecost after Christ's ascension, the apostles' gospel message was that the kingdom had arrived, with Jesus the Lord and Christ as its eternal King, sitting on the spiritual throne of David, and citizenship free to anyone who would but believe and obey the gospel. Indeed, those who gladly received the apostles' message obeyed and were saved, and God added them to the church (Acts 2:41,47).

Today, we do not pray that God's kingdom come in the same sense that Jesus taught His disciples to pray, because the kingdom is here – it was established with Jesus as its King when God raised Him from the dead, and it has thrived ever since as the church. That is why the apostle John referred to himself as a brother in the kingdom of Jesus Christ in Revelation 1:9,

and why Paul wrote that Christians have been conveyed by God into the “kingdom of the Son of His love” (Colossians 1:2,13). Citizens of the “kingdom of Christ and God” are the saved of all time, the souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus, those whose names are recorded in the Book of Life (Ephesians 5:5; Revelation 20:15).

Now, we don’t pray “Your kingdom come” as Jesus taught the disciples of His day, but that does not mean we lack instruction concerning what to pray for Christ’s kingdom, the church. It’s not automatic or natural that we should immediately know what to pray for the church. Oftentimes we don’t even know how to pray for our own lives (Romans 8:26), and the church is exceedingly more complex. Gladly, the inspired writers of the New Testament often recorded their own prayers for the church, and we can imitate these prayers. For instance, Paul prayed in Romans 15:13 that Christians would be filled with hope and joy and peace. In Colossians 4:3, Paul left precedent for Christians to pray for preachers of the gospel, that God would open doors for the word to be preached, that the borders of the kingdom would ever expand. Hebrews 13:20-21 record a beautiful prayer for the church, that God would make His children “complete in every good work to do His will, working in us what is well pleasing in His sight.” And certainly it is scriptural to pray that Christ will soon return and deliver the kingdom to the Father, that the saved might reign with the Lord in peace forever and ever (I Corinthians 15:24; Revelation 22:5). As John prayed in Revelation 22:20, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

Your Will Be Done

During the course of the prayer that Jesus teaches His disciples as a model in Matthew 6, the Christ includes in verse 10 the petition, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Like the first phrase of this rich passage (“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name”), this phrase further seeks to glorify the name of God, to magnify His sovereignty and divine right to rule over the things which He made. Children of God must learn to ever focus on God’s will, giving Him priority over our own needs and desires in prayer. The Scriptures even reveal in passages like James 4:3 and I John 5:14 that God refuses to entertain prayers asked against His will or solely for selfish pleasure.

Learning to mold the will to match that of the Father’s is part of growing to spiritual maturity in Jesus Christ. In I Peter 4:1-2, the inspired apostle explains that when a person becomes a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, he or she must depart from sin and cease serving the will of the flesh to live only for the will of God. Even while the Son of God walked this earth as a man, he taught through example that mankind is to submit to the Father in all things. Never do we see such humble submission in accordance with Matthew 6:10 than in Matthew 26 when Jesus Christ prays to God for deliverance just before His betrayal and arrest in the garden of Gethsemane. Our Savior knew the torture He would endure, the abandonment He would face when all those He loved would forsake Him and flee. He knew and despised the shame of the cross (Hebrews 12:2), and yet He prayed fervently to God with tears, “Not my will, but Your will be done” – Jesus Christ unfailingly put the will of God before His own. Jesus taught His disciples to submit to God’s will, and He lived out that command in total obedience that lead Him even to the death of the cross. In like manner, Christ commands all of His disciples:

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me ...And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 16:24, 10:38).

In other words, if we are going to follow Jesus Christ as true servants of God, we must deny our own preferences and desires whenever they contradict the will of God and simply carry out the work that God commands us to do.

Considering these principles, children of God should pray that God’s righteous will would constantly be done, starting with our own lives – that we would have the faith and strength to set aside pride and stubbornness to ever seek the just pleasure of our Father. Expanding upon this concept, Christians should furthermore beseech the Father that His will would be accomplished in the church, the only institution in all the world given the responsibility to constantly uphold God’s will (II Timothy 3:15). And further still, children of God should pray that God’s will and righteousness would spread throughout the world, carried on the lips of those who love and obey the gospel. The will of God should be the paramount concern in the lives and prayers of all Christians. As the author of Hebrews prayed in chapter 13, verses 20-21 of that epistle:

“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Our Daily Bread

With the first few phrases of the model prayer Jesus teaches His disciples in Matthew 6, the Christ focuses His listeners on the importance of glorifying God in prayer and giving preeminence to His will. Then, as we read in Matthew 6:11, the Christ abruptly turns the focus of the prayer from the kingdom and sovereignty of God to man’s daily needs and labors, teaching that children of God should pray to the Father, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Most probably, bread in this phrase represents not just food but all the daily necessities that humans must have to survive. However, Jesus’ comment in verse 8 of this chapter, that the Father knows the things His children need before they even ask, suggests that the principles of prayer taught in this phrase extend beyond simply pleading for God to remember and provide our physical sustenance.

First of all, Matthew 6:11 teaches the wonderful truth that no concern or desire of mortal man is too miniscule or insignificant to bring before God in prayer. Certainly, the Father yearns for His children to glorify Him and give utmost priority to His divine will – these responsibilities are the very foundation of not only acceptable prayers but of godly lives. However, God does not disregard the fact that our needs and cares in this life are important as well. In fact, somewhat surprisingly, Jesus places the petition for physical needs before that of forgiveness of sins and deliverance from temptation in both Matthew 6:11-13 and Luke 11:3-4. Our Father desires for us to learn that no matter is so trivial that we should fear talking to Him about it. Correspondingly, Paul appeals in Philippians 4:6, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...”

Furthermore, “give us this day our daily bread” is a prayer that teaches faith and contentment. When Jesus taught His disciples a similar model prayer under different circumstances, we find slightly different wording of this petition, for Jesus states in Luke 11:3, “Give us day by day our daily bread.” The words *day by day* indicate a bit more clearly that children of God should ask for and be content with God’s provisions one day at a time. In Exodus 16 we read that God provided manna for the children of Israel in rations sufficient for only one day – thus, they were humbled in their dependence on the Lord and should have learned to have faith that God provides constantly for His children, not just once in a while (cf. Deuteronomy 8:3). In the same manner, Jesus teaches through His simple model prayer that Christians should learn contentment and faith that God will provide the things we need here and now – and that contented attitude should be reflected in our prayers. Consider the prayer of the wise man in Proverbs 30:8, “Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches – feed me with the food allotted to me.” Or as the NIV translates this proverb, “give me only my daily bread.”

Children of the Most High must do the work of the Lord while it is today and deal with tomorrow when that day comes. Later in the Sermon on the Mount, at Matthew 6:31-34, Jesus punctuates on this principle, warning that food and drink and physical needs should not become a disciple’s primary concern, concluding with these words: “For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” This attitude of faith is reaffirmed in our hearts and demonstrated in our prayers when we follow Jesus’ model in asking God for our daily bread. Praise be to God the Father that there is no issue, no concern of man that is too little to bring before Him in prayer, and that He is profoundly concerned with all aspects of the lives of His children so that we can be assured and content that He will provide for us every minute of every faithful day.

Forgive To Gain Forgiveness

In Psalm 32, the psalmist exclaims, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!” Truly, forgiveness is one of the most profound blessings that God gives His penitent children. Just as daily bread plays a vital role in the life of the body, the soul cannot survive without the cleansing that God provides through Jesus Christ. Consequently, in His final comments of the model prayer recorded in Matthew 6, Jesus instructs His disciples to petition the Father for His forgiveness, using the prayerful words: “forgive our sins, as we forgive those who are indebted to us” (cf. Matthew 6:12 with Luke 11:4).

To have a clear conscience by God’s forgiveness is one the greatest spiritual benefits available in Jesus Christ. Few blessings give greater comfort than to know that our loving Father understands our shortcomings and is quick to hear our cries for forgiveness – as stated in I John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” However, this phrase in Matthew 6 teaches a vitally important lesson about beseeching the Lord for forgiveness: as God mercifully forgives the wrongs we commit, we must willingly forgive others of the trespasses they commit against us, as well. We cannot prayerfully seek God’s forgiveness while holding on to hateful grudges for wickedness done to us in the past. In fact, the language Jesus uses in this passage indicates that we need to forgive

others *first*, and then humbly ask God to forgive us our wrongs. This principle echoes in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, taught by Jesus in Matthew 18:21-35. In this narrative, a compassionate master forgives his servant an unimaginable debt, yet the servant turns around and, for but a very minute unpaid debt, throws his own debtor into prison. When the merciful master hears of this unjust and unrighteous behavior, he condemns the servant to be tortured “until he should pay all that was due” (Matthew 18:24). Jesus goes on to say in verse 15, “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

Furthermore, the words Jesus uses in Matthew 6:12 also indicate that forgiveness must be a virtue God’s children practice continually. Jesus taught that His disciples should forgive those indebted to them not just once, but as many times as they might seek that forgiveness. Consider Matthew 18:22, the preliminary conversation that motivated the aforementioned parable, when Peter asked of Jesus, “‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’” Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’” Our God and Father is quick to forgive His children no matter how many times we stumble and seek His mercy, therefore He expects us to likewise forgive and forget as often as is required of us.

The virtue of unmerited forgiveness should be an integral part of the very nature of all Christians, for it is an integral part of the nature of God. In Psalm 103, the psalmist declares that “as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our transgressions from us.” Requesting God’s forgiveness from a heart full of humility and penitence is an important part of our prayers. We must thank God always that He is eager to forgive us when we turn from our sins; but also keep in mind that He is merciful and forgiving even though we don’t deserve it. In turn, He expects us to be merciful and loving to the people in our lives who haven’t necessarily earned such treatment either – as the holy apostle commands in Colossians 3:13, “even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”

Lead Us Not Into Temptation

After instructing His disciples in the model prayer that they should pray to the Father for forgiveness of sins, Jesus goes on to include a final request in Matthew 6:13, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” The word *temptation* literally means *trials*, and comes from a Greek verb meaning to test, try, or prove (Vine). In this life, temptations and trials spring from many different sources. For instance, temptation might come from a difficult commandment of God, testing our faith and willingness to obey in all things – Abraham was tried in this way when commanded to sacrifice his only son Isaac (Hebrews 11:17). Trials might arise from physical deformities or diseases, as the apostle Paul suffered his “trial in the flesh” (Galatians 4:13,14 – notice that this malady, whatever it was, also became a trial to the Christians in Galatia, tempting them to despise and reject Paul and his gospel message, yet they did not yield). But, most probably, the temptations that Christ refers to in the model prayer are those propagated by the evil one, Satan – trials that tempt us to sin, or trials that tempt us to deny the faith.

Christians throughout the centuries have faced fiery trials of persecution sent from the evil one to tempt them to forsake Christ. James wrote to Christians facing such temptations and exhorted that persecution, if endured without wavering, produces patience (James 1:3, cf. I Peter 1:6f). Other passages in the Bible speak of the ferocity with which Satan seeks to cause the children of God to stumble (I Corinthians 7:5; II Corinthians 2:11; II Corinthians 11:14; Ephesians 6:11; I Peter 5:8). The Holy Spirit clearly reveals in James 1:13-14 that these temptations to work evil do not come from God, but begin inside us with desire and lust for evil things. Jesus speaks of the origin of all man's wickedness in Mark 7:20-23, stating that these sins start with a defiled heart – these are the sins that cannot tempt God, and that He does not tempt us with. These evil passions become temptations when Satan provides an enticement, an opportunity to sinfully act upon those corrupt desires. Therefore, Jesus teaches His disciples in the model prayer to petition God that He would not allow the devil to tempt us in our weakness, but that we might have the strength and self control to avoid stumbling into temptation and sin. As the Psalmist prayed in Psalm 141:4, “Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men who work iniquity.”

Children of God gain much from the petition of Christ in Matthew 6:13. First, it's important to note that this petition for deliverance comes after beseeching the Lord for forgiveness of sins (Matthew 6:12). By praying in this manner we reflect in our prayers not only our weakness and need for forgiveness, but also our renewed determination to live a life free from the sins that stained us before. Thus, it is contradictory to the nature of faithful children of God to beseech the Father for forgiveness with no intention of turning from wicked ways. Secondly, clearly it is not wrong to pray for avoidance of suffering and temptation, as long as we give proper priority to the will of God in our prayers – Jesus Christ Himself illustrates this point when He prayed to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42). Furthermore, it is encouraging to note that this phrase of the model prayer necessarily implies that God the Father has control over the extent to which Satan can buffet the children of the Most High. Paul recognized God's power over the snares of the devil when he prayed that the thorn in his flesh, that mysterious messenger sent from Satan, might be taken away by the power of the Lord (II Corinthians 12:7f).

Children of God should find encouragement and hope in God's absolute power over the trials we face in this life. Christians have assurance that our Father, in His mercy and grace, will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear, but provides a way of escape with every temptation we face (I Corinthians 10:13). Therefore, it is fitting to pray for both wisdom to recognize the escape route, and spiritual strength to flee from sin.