

A Sermon  
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Grace Baptist Church  
Bryans Road, Maryland  
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## **Teach Us to Pray: Doxology**

Matthew 6:9-13

Today we conclude our sermon series on the Lord's Prayer. We began by listening as Jesus calls us into his relationship with the Father, who is the source of our life and salvation, and whose holiness shapes us, individually and together. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." Then we listened as Jesus teaches us to long for and pray for the loving sovereignty of God, the reign of Christ, to be fully and finally manifested in the world and in our lives. "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven." Then we listened as Jesus reminds us of our dependence upon God for our daily provision, and our responsibility for practicing the kingdom by providing for the hungry. "Give us this day our daily bread." Then we listened as Jesus reminds us of our need to receive God's gift of forgiveness and to pass it on to others by practicing mercy in our lives. "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." Then last week we listened as Jesus tells us to anticipate experiences of trial and testing as his disciples, so that we can grow in our reliance upon God for our full and final deliverance. "Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil."

That brings us to the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer: "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen." Or as many of us have learned it: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen." Notice that the prayer ends not with a petition, but with praise. After beginning with an address, calling God "Father," then moving into a series of petitions, the prayer concludes with doxology, an act of worship expressing adoration and ascribing honor to God. You may recognize the term "Doxology" from the short hymn of praise that we sometimes use in our services: "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow / Praise Him, all creatures here below / Praise Him above, ye heavenly host / Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen."

When you hear "Amen" you know that you've reached the end of the prayer, or in this case the song. Recall that in Matthew, the Lord's Prayer appears within the Sermon on the Mount. The prayer follows upon some instruction Jesus has given about private prayers. Among his disciples, these prayers are to be different from some of their fellow Jews who like to perform their private religious obligations in public, to be seen and heard by other people. Jesus even goes on to use some Gentiles as a negative example, because they seem to think that long-winded prayers are more effective. In their wordy attempts to manipulate God, it takes them longer to get to the "Amen."

But the aim of prayer isn't to get God to do our bidding. On the contrary, it's to make ourselves an offering to God for his plans and purposes. Preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick has written, "Of all the misconceptions of prayer, none is more common than the idea that it is a way of *getting God to do our will*." He goes on to say that prayer is not "simply self-will, expecting the Almighty to back it up and give it right-of-way."<sup>1</sup> During our exploration of the Lord's Prayer, we've already been through the petition at the heart of the matter: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven." While there's certainly a present dimension to the prayer, it's primarily oriented toward the future, as followers of

Jesus actively anticipate the full arrival of God's reign. That's what we long for, pray for, and prepare for. That's what shapes the way we live in the present.

And our living is inseparable from our worshiping. The Lord's Prayer moves in the direction of praise. It aims us toward adoration. "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever." The "now" includes this gathering on this day. It includes this day's songs, this day's prayers, this day's offerings, this day's sermon. We present all these things, indeed our very selves, to the Father whose whose Son has brought the light and life of heaven into a dark and dying world. That's why we direct our attention to the Lord. As one person has put it, "In Christian worship, only God's glory, not human glory, should be unveiled. God should be glorified; humans should be edified."<sup>2</sup>

The words Jesus gives us to pray are God-glorifying words. They're not just words that enable us to talk about God. They're words that enable us to talk to God. They're words that bring us into the presence of God, so that by the time we reach the "Amen," there's no doubt that we've been seeking his will, not just asking him to sign off on our will.

There's a scene in the Disney film *Anne of Green Gables* where Anne, an orphaned girl, is being taught how to pray by her guardian Marilla Cuthbert. When Marilla instructs Anne to begin by kneeling beside her bed, Anne interrupts:

"That's the part I never really could understand. Why must people kneel down to pray? If I really wanted to pray, I'd go out into a great big field, all alone. I'd look up into the sky. I'd imagine it was the dome of a great cathedral. Oh, and then, I'd close my eyes and just feel the prayer. What am I to say?"

"Well," answers Marilla, "I think you're old enough to think of your own prayer. You thank God for his blessings, and then humbly ask him for the things you want."

"I'll do my best. Dear gracious heavenly Father, I thank you for everything. As for the things I especially want, they're so numerous it would take a great deal of time to mention them all. So, I'll just mention the two most important: please let me stay at Green Gables; please make me beautiful when I grow up. I remain yours respectfully, Anne Shirley—with an e. Did I do all right?"

Ms. Cuthbert replies, "Yes, if you were addressing a business letter to the catalog store. Get into bed."

Anne says, "I should have said 'amen' instead of 'yours respectfully.' Think it'll make any difference?"

"I expect God will overlook it—this time. Good night."

"Good night, Ms. Cuthbert."

Ms. Cuthbert mumbles, "That girl is next door to a perfect heathen."<sup>3</sup>

Though Ms. Cuthbert's remark is an overstatement, Anne's experience with learning how to pray certainly points, in a lighthearted way, to the importance of how we end. The Lord's Prayer doesn't conclude with, "Yours respectfully," but with a resounding "Amen." Even when we're not sure which words, or how many words, to say during the course of a prayer, we know where we're headed. We're on our way to the "Amen." That's the one word, the one part of the prayer, that we often feel most confident about.

The word "Amen" has its roots in a Hebrew term that means "to be firm, steady, or trustworthy." It typically concludes acts of worship, especially doxologies and prayers. The term has several meanings, but they all cluster around the theme of certainty or confidence. "Amen" means "Let it be so" or "So be it" or "This is true" or "This is certain." "Amen" is essentially your yes to or your confidence in what has been expressed in the prayer or other act of worship.

Of course, saying "Amen," like other parts of our life of prayer and worship, can become hollow and repetitive. We can get so accustomed to using certain words and phrases that we don't think much about what we're saying or why we're saying it. One person tells about a friend from their church youth group who worked at a department store after school. One day she was asked to announce the cafeteria specials over the loudspeaker. She finished her announcement with, "Thank you for shopping with us and have a nice day." Then without thinking, she added, "In Jesus' name, Amen."

Part of my purpose in this series of sermons has been to help you and myself take the words and phrases of the Lord's Prayer, so familiar and so often repeated, and slow down for some deeper exploration of what they mean. It's one thing to recite this prayer in private or public worship. But it's another thing to reflect on to whom we're praying, for what we're praying, and toward what end we're praying. Now this doesn't mean that learning the Lord's Prayer by heart is a minor thing. In fact, when I began this series of sermons, one of the first things I encouraged you to do was to memorize it.

I remember concluding a visit with a woman in a nursing home. I closed by reading some Scripture and leading us in prayer. She said, "Thank you, that was beautiful." I turned to leave the room, and she surprised me by saying, "Now I've got a prayer I'd like to say." As she lay on her back, the same position she rested in day after day, she put her hands together, fingers twisted from years of arthritis, and began, "Our Father who art in heaven..." Somewhere in her long journey of faith, she had learned the prayer. It was still with her, and in her, and coming forth from her. With it, she brought us again into the presence of God, and her room became a place of worship, a space of doxology.

I think back to our earlier Scripture reading from Romans where Paul, after pondering the bigness of God's purposes and the boundaries of human understanding, breaks into song, and invites his hearers to join him in a hymn of praise. "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Rom. 11:33). And then, as Eugene Peterson renders the closing verse:

Everything comes from him;  
Everything happens through him;  
Everything ends up in him.  
Always glory! Always praise!  
Yes. Yes. Yes.<sup>4</sup>

There's the "Amen" again. A big, resounding "Yes." In one of his letters to the Corinthians, Paul says that Jesus is God's "Yes", God's "Amen" to all that he has spoken and promised (2 Cor. 1:20). "And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God."

When we reach the end of the Lord's Prayer, we arrive at a place of praise. "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever." The Lord's Prayer leads us to worship. It leads us to Jesus, who himself fulfills and enacts all that this prayer confesses and asks. In Christ himself, the glory of the Father is revealed. In Christ himself, the kingdom comes. In Christ himself, we have the bread that nourishes us. In Christ himself,

our sins are forgiven. In Christ himself, we're delivered from the evil one. In Christ himself, God's will reaches its culmination and destination. As Wesley Hill says, "Petitions will not be necessary in God's future. We will cease asking God to supply our needs, since we will be entirely satisfied. All that will remain is to praise God—to enjoy His benevolent reign, to rejoice in what His power has achieved, and to see His glory."<sup>5</sup> And all God's people say, "Amen."

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Meaning of Prayer* (New York: Association, 1920) 55.

<sup>2</sup> Ben Witherington III, *We Have Seen His Glory: A Vision of Kingdom Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 149.

<sup>3</sup> *Anne of Green Gables*. Directed by Kevin Sullivan and based on a novel by Lucy Maud Montgomery, Walt Disney, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary English* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1993) 328.

<sup>5</sup> Wesley Hill. *The Lord's Prayer: A Guide to Praying to Our Father*. Christian Essentials (Bellingham: Lexam, 2019) Kindle edition.